

GUANTÁNAMO: WHAT'S NEXT?



SARGASSO

2017-18, I & II

DON E. WALICEK & JESSICA ADAMS, ISSUE EDITORS

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SARGASSO Guantánamo: What's Next? (2017-18, I & II)

Sargasso, a peer-reviewed journal of literature, language, and culture edited at the University of Puerto Rico's Río Piedras Campus, publishes critical essays, interviews, book reviews, as well as poems and short stories. The journal seeks original submissions that have not been published elsewhere, including new translations. *Sargasso* particularly welcomes material written by or about the people of the Caribbean region and its multiple diasporas. Comparative work is also welcome. Unless otherwise specified, essays and critical studies should conform to the guidelines of the *MLA Handbook*. Short stories should be kept to no more than 2,500 words in length and poems should be kept to thirty lines or less. See our webpage and Facebook page for open calls, submission guidelines, and additional information. For inquiries or electronic submission, write to: sargassojournal@gmail.com.

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Guantánamo: What's Next?

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INTRODUCTION

GUANTÁNAMO AND THE FUTURE

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It is the natives, all the wretched of the earth, who, breaking out of their reservation, are now called upon to reinvent the very concept of the human, through a restructuring of the world system created by the discovery and conquest of the New World by the West.

—Sylvia Wynter, *Black Metamorphosis:
New Natives in a New World*

What is the future? To what extent does Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, reflect a Caribbean future? What explains the bay as a force that impacts what's next in so many instances around the globe?

Guantánamo Bay is a place that foreshadows the conditions and ideologies that are poised to unfold elsewhere. Yet, it is also a place that appears suspended, floating in an eternal present in which past and future can be indistinguishable. Revealing patterns that are both loyal to repetition and willing to adapt to change, the bay's past underscores the dramatic variations of historical timespace and challenges politicians, prisoners, poets, and other observers to reimagine the conventions meant to help us make sense of the passage of time.

Responding to questions about what Guantánamo means provides insights that can transform how we see the future. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, the Russian philosopher and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) used the concept of the chronotope to explore the inseparability of space and time in human social action. Considered in this light, Guantánamo Bay reveals that

some places are strategically poised to inhabit the future. It points not to a single chronotope so much as a set of chronotopes, each of which is differentiated by spatiotemporal parameters and, at the more granular level, divergent views of humanity. The patterns of life and death that transcend these chronotopes bring into relief dominant views of the world that exclude large numbers of people from the category of human. These are often people who have been enslaved, degraded, colonized, or marginalized on the basis of characteristics such as race, nationality, religion, and socioeconomic status. But chronotopes also transmit strength and hope. In virtually each and every incarnation of this place, history embraces resistance to bring together space and time.

Migrants, refugees, prisoners, conscientious objectors, and others who have lived near its shores—like those who perished trying to find sanctuary there—have questioned the premise that violence should shape the future. Evidence of these general patterns abounds even in the context of the War on Terror. We encounter it, for example, in writings by former prisoners that document their experiences of incarceration at Guantánamo Bay. These texts show that their perspectives diverge not only from those of their captors and the institutions responsible for their incarceration, but also from a broader mindset that shuns knowledge of their names, their histories, their languages, and the realities of U.S. imperialism.¹ The writings of Mourad Benchellali, Ahmed Errachidi, Mohamedou Ould Slahi, and other former prisoners insist that the future should be shaped by an insistence that much can be learned from the past.

Time and space at Guantánamo Bay also come together in plans for the future that never materialized. Consider the example of the Royal Commission of Guantánamo (also known as the Mopox Commission), a large-scale scientific initiative of the Spanish Crown under the charge of King Carlos IV of Spain. Working between 1796 and 1802, its members completed a detailed assessment of the space's natural resources and also produced numerous maps, elaborate technical papers, and policies that would serve as a guide for building two highly efficient modern cities in Guantánamo Bay. The cities, called La Paz and Alcudia, were to be inhabited initially only by white populations, but they were also imagined as the homes of special group of refugees, among whom were French slaveowners who fled St. Domingue during the events that would become known as the Haitian Revolution. The historian Jonathan

¹ See Spivak for related comments on challenges that the humanities faced in the aftermath of 9/11.

Hansen explains that these cities were never built, mainly due to the limited funds of the Spanish government and potential immigrants' lack of interest in the eastern part of Cuba (which many of them saw as too close to Haiti) (38-39). However, in the 1990s, tent cities for unwanted Caribbean refugees were built on the same ground where the cities were to stand. One of their functions was to keep Haitian asylum-seekers out of the U.S.

It is essential not to be bound by what western imperialism has made of this space—the degradation of morals, of the environment, of international relations, of ethics and justice. Talking in an informed and forward-looking way about Guantánamo requires stopping, starting again, coming back around, holding contradictions in tension and simultaneously giving attention to hope. When paired with a steady survey of the horizon, this process means that Gitmo can provide insights that assist in effectively addressing not just the problems that cluster around the bay, but also manifestations of them in other places, among them everyday practices of incarceration, language, and racialized violence in the U.S. and the Caribbean.

Today in the U.S., the country with the highest incarceration rates in the world, more than forty states have super-maximum security—or “super-max”—prison facilities primarily designed to hold people in long-term isolation. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than 80,000 men, women, and children are held in solitary confinement, an experience that often either triggers or exacerbates mental health problems.² In the Caribbean, incarceration rates are among the highest in the world, with St. Kitts and Nevis, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Cuba, and Belize all reflecting rates that are more than twice the global median rate of 142 prisoners per 100,000 people (Coyle et al. 765). Our survey of recent scholarship on incarceration confirms that many of the inhuman conditions that have made the military prison at Guantánamo Bay infamous have also been documented both in the U.S. and the Caribbean. The violations of basic rights in these spaces remind us that the barely visible U.S. military base is not the key determinant of what Guantánamo means. They signal that critical analysis can nurture creative and humane responses to underlying problems in the areas of politics, economics, and epistemology.

The idea behind this issue of *Sargasso* is not to predict or summon events that will unfold in the future, but to present cultural, literary, and historical

² See statistics compiled by the American Friends Service Committee and those available at solitarywatch.org.

analysis alongside other forms of artistic expression so that they can assist us in thinking and acting both creatively and proactively. These responses to predicaments of the present can contribute to greater levels of awareness about the significance of this Caribbean site. Greater awareness is key because knowledge about Guantánamo, while frequently partial and riddled with contradictions, is at the same time powerful, persuasive, and expansive in scope.

With these issues of scale, language, and place in mind, we underscore that the essays, interviews, and other contributions presented here reference multiple Guantánamos—the camps, the prison, the migrant detention center, the military base known as Gitmo, Guantánamo Bay, Guantánamo City, and Guantánamo Province, among others. The commonalities, clashes, pulls, and overlaps across these places and their affiliated chronotopes call on us to chart how the future should inherit and deploy the all-important concepts of agency, consciousness, and freedom.

Imagining the Future

Guan-tá-na-mo has spread from indigenous languages of the Caribbean to Spanish, to English, and now to the lexicons of languages all over the planet. The mere utterance of its four syllables can trigger frustration, anger, fear, and pain, especially when it forms part of exchanges about migration, asylum, or war. Thanks to the War on Terror and the pathways of U.S. capital and foreign policy, in many contexts the word's deceptive lure turns heads and beckons crude connections, threatening to give way to a perverse paradox in which the perpetration of violence becomes normalized and worthy of praise. But seeds of resistance lie within its frustrated use as a metaphor for imperial hubris, lawlessness, secrecy, security, and torture, more often than not functioning as a trope in talk about the future.

Guantánamo's diachronic trajectory reiterates the importance of critical perspectives that traverse the boundaries of the nation-state. Perspectives that emerge from greater Caribbean experiences assist in rethinking the assumption that tomorrow will automatically be better than today or yesterday. Experiences of anti-colonialism, revolution, self-determination, and freedom across the region assist in assessing the factors that unleash change as well as those that inhibit it. They indicate that analyses of history and political-economic relations are useful for rethinking the future as a realm in which

people and institutions exercise a significant degree of control. These experiences point to the possibility of a semantic shift so powerful that it would redefine *Guantánamo*, both within the naval base and in the minds of those responsible for explaining the actions of those who assault humanitarian norms with impunity.³

A Legacy of Violence

Most readers know that the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay is controversial because of its links to various forms of violence, but information detailing this violence is often vague, and even general accounts of past violations of basic rights are subjected to aggressive forces of erasure.⁴ With this in mind, we point out that the naval base is the site from which the U.S. has engaged in military actions in Cuba and Mexico as well as the platform from which it invaded and occupied several Caribbean and Central American countries. At times, U.S. troops toppled progressive governments elected by the people.

This list of military actions—a litany suggesting how violence redirected the futures of entire societies—shows that this single site has played a significant role in the geopolitical transformation of the Caribbean region:

Puerto Rico (1898–today)
Cuba (1898, 1906–1909, 1912)
Mexico (1913)
Haiti (1914–1934)
The Dominican Republic (1916–1924)
Nicaragua (1926–1933)
Guatemala (1960)

What does time mean when the same thing happens over and over? Is this a way of forcibly defining what people should value? Guantánamo Bay

³ Forsythe argues that civilian attorneys advised high-ranking U.S. government officials about how to break the law, and that they marginalized U.S. State Department officials (including National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice) in the early years of the War on Terror (470–471).

⁴ For a discussion of erasure, see Walicek 68–70 concerning a narrative about the treatment of refugees at Gitmo that the now retired U.S. Marine Corps general John Kelly shared in a press conference in 2015.

as a militarized space is itself a contradiction—a ritual performed to create a concept of the enemy; a gray area; a place in which the concept of sovereignty is troubled at every turn, and therefore must be performed and re-performed daily in the most emphatic possible terms. And yet—invisible.

The point of this ritual is to sustain. The point of this ritual is to not let us get too far ahead of ourselves. The point of this ritual is to reinforce common values that “we” share and to define “us.” The invisible, yet glaring, performance of violence has repeatedly consumed the heart of “Guantánamo,” a concept fraught by modernity’s tragically limited view of what should come next.⁵ The cycles of violence that have closed in on this place are always contested—and as we have suggested, resistance to them operates in dialogue with layers of Caribbean history, ensuring that hope is maintained in both what is sustained as ritual and in our visions of a more sustainable future.

Guantánamo Bay is also the site of a sequence of controversial experiments in migrant detention and the interpretation of asylum. For example, in the 1990s roughly 45,000 Cubans and Haitians who were seeking sanctuary were detained in camps there for long periods of time. While both groups were held under unacceptable conditions, the situation that the Haitians faced was especially horrific. Reports document numerous problems: many were denied access to lawyers and adequate medical care, some were beaten and put in solitary confinement, others were forcibly repatriated to Haiti (where they were persecuted or even faced death), and those who were HIV positive were imprisoned behind barbed wire, in conditions that their advocates described as like those of concentration camps.⁶

Less well known is that since 1991, the base has also been home to a secretive migrant operations center that has held asylum seekers and other migrants. Operated by a private corporation, people detained there include individuals who fled persecution, many with the hope of finding sanctuary in the U.S. However, because authorities wish to discourage the entry of poor people who travel by boat, even those legally recognized as refugees have been systematically denied entry to the U.S.⁷

⁵ For comments on the relationship between freedom, modernity, and central characteristics of Caribbean history see Walicek and Adams 12-13.

⁶ See Hansen 265-302, Braziel 135-142, and Farmer 214-243 for details on conditions faced by Haitian asylum seekers.

⁷ The GEO Group Inc., formerly Wackenhut Correction Corporation, held the contract between 2003 and 2006. Guyanese, Cubans, and Chinese are among those who have been held in the facility.

The U.S. Navy is currently spending millions of dollars on the development of infrastructure that can be used to set up crude tent cities like those that existed on the base in the 1990s. According to journalist Carol Rosenberg, this infrastructure has been planned to facilitate the housing of migrants, in particular those who flee Cuba or Haiti for U.S. shores in the case of a large-scale migration event.

Today, the base is most notorious as the site of imprisonment for the 780 suspected terrorists who were captured after 9/11. These Muslim men were systematically denied the protections guaranteed under the Geneva Conventions. Almost all of them were held indefinitely without charges; many were tortured and subjected to degrading forms of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse.⁸ While such treatment is abhorrent under any circumstances, most of these men proved to be innocent of the crimes that they were initially suspected of committing.

Violence undergirds the nature of the legal proceedings that can determine the futures of the current prisoners. This is an outcome of the U.S. government's efforts to defend not justice but civilization writ large through a new type of war that President George W. Bush described as "the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom," one that was supposed to make the civilized world proud and defend "American values" (Bush). The chances of the fight, which was initially called Operation Infinite Justice, emerging as just or capable of inspiring peace were never good, but they were diminished greatly by the decision to use Guantánamo Bay as a site for incarcerating and trying Muslims who were described to the world as enemies of freedom.⁹ Some of the world's most powerful jurists and politicians applauded the decision, just as they would approve of definitions of waterboarding as something other than torture, but others denounced it as bizarre and altogether illegitimate. Among the latter were soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan. Members of the invading forces, they quietly suggested that taking detainees to Guantánamo Bay would only provoke the enemy to treat they themselves unfairly (Potorti 62).

⁸ According to the Guantánamo Docket, a *New York Times* online resource, seven men have been charged and two have been convicted; a trial in the Military Commissions System has been proposed for three other individuals.

⁹ After protests from several Arab states, which argued that only Allah provides "infinite justice," on September 25, 2001, Operation Infinite Justice was changed to Operation Enduring Freedom.

Some of the survivors of those who lost their lives in the nightmarish events of 9/11 spoke out in more vocal ways. For example, following her visit to the base, Julia Rodríguez, sister of Greg Rodríguez, who perished in the World Trade Center, described the legal hearings there as “an unlawful and immoral experiment”; in her words, “[t]here has never been a trial like this in American history—one in which defendants accused of civilian crimes are tried in military court, in an offshore prison and in a system that does not uphold human-rights standards for a fair trial.”¹⁰

Crucially, the violence of the aforementioned events is not limited to the past. Instead, it’s ongoing—it extends into the realities of today. Speaking about Guantánamo Bay in 2003, the historian Amy Kaplan called Guantánamo “a story of the future,” and then went on to state, “We face the danger today that this floating colony will become the norm rather than an anomaly, that homeland security will increasingly depend on proliferating these mobile, ambiguous spaces between the domestic and the foreign” (14–15). But some of what she predicted has already taken shape. As we explain below, plans, laws, and regulations associated with controversial asylum and immigration laws and policies in other regions of the world have been modeled after those at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay. In addition, powerful politicians in the U.S. and Europe alike have recently called for the future construction of Guantánamo-inspired facilities. However, it’s not clear whether proponents of such initiatives are aware of the disastrous consequences of the laws, policies, and practices that they seek to emulate. In addition to suggesting that history doesn’t matter, much of the mainstream media shapes the future by propagating myths about the base, its past, and the men imprisoned there. This is clear in sensationalistic coverage and the ongoing use of terms such as “enemy combatant” even after they are abandoned by the White House, among other tendencies.¹¹

These and other developments—including the U.S. government’s plans to build a new contingency mass migration complex at the base—motivated us to conceptualize this issue as a follow-up project to our edited volume

¹⁰ “Guantánamo Is Delaying Justice for 9/11 Families,” the *New York Times*, November 13, 2017.

¹¹ The U.S. Attorney General officially abandoned “enemy combatant” in 2009, but it continues to be used by government officials and the media. Also problematic is the use of “suspected terrorist” to refer to men who are no longer suspected of having committed acts terrorism.

Guantánamo and American Empire: The Humanities Respond (2018). We see this project as directly engaged with questions about the discursive construction of not only places and people but also dominant understandings of rights, freedom, sovereignty, security, and justice, both domestically and within the global networks of U.S. empire. Raymond Williams taught us that such keywords are of great power and utility, noting that their definitions are caught up in social, economic, and cultural dynamics. Kaplan builds on his legacy by urging scholars to “draw on our knowledge of the powerful alternative meanings of these keywords from both national and transnational sources”; pointing out that struggles over history are also struggles over language and culture, she suggests that it’s not enough to expose lies associated with the hijacking of cherished concepts (7). In Caribbean contexts, these concepts have assisted in constructing the status quo and formulating both critiques of it and demands for social change, at times through actions that colonial powers denounced as misguided appropriation.

What happens when multiple forces converge to redefine keywords, once again through violence that is enacted upon the very groups that sacrificed their labor, lives, and lands for freedom, or out of respect for the rule of law, only to be marginalized as criminals, outsiders, non-belongers, or terrorists? When will the public accept that the dominant epistemology is frighteningly transnational, that the exchange of one keyword for another is unlikely to lead to meaningful change?

At this juncture in the twenty-first century, almost two decades after 9/11, violence thrives in the material space of justice and security. In these realms, “alternative meanings” take on new responsibilities, and our gazes move beyond the distant horizon, across the boundaries of nation-states and regions. The epigraph from the Jamaican philosopher and novelist Sylvia Wynter that launches this introduction prompts us to imagine keywords as semiotic resources for the two types of radical meaning-making that she identifies as essential for the future: the reinvention of the concept of human and the restructuring of the world system.

As a set of chronotopes with an important role to play in the restructuring that Wynter writes about, Guantánamo Bay reveals how language and military practices come together to impact commonplace understandings of governance and the public good. As Jana Evans Braziel argues, the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay has functioned as a “militarized center” for at least three rhetorically determined yet still materially destructive wars: the War

on Drugs, the War on Terror, and the War Against Refugees (138). As she points out, these wars have rallied substantial political support domestically and internationally. They have also secured exorbitant U.S. government funding.

Recent Events

Once our work on the issue of *Sargasso* was underway, the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay was repeatedly mentioned in the news, frequently in statements about the future by high-ranking U.S. government officials. For example, in his State of the Union address in January of 2018, Donald Trump asked the U.S. Congress “to ensure that, in the fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda, we continue to have all the necessary power to detain terrorists—wherever we chase them down, wherever we find them. And in many cases for them it will now be Guantánamo Bay” (State of the Union). Congress promptly responded to Trump’s request for funds, approving more than \$200 million in new construction at the naval base. Of course these moves coincide with President Trump’s signing of an executive order that authorized the U.S. military to continue its incarceration of prisoners and to “transport additional detainees to U.S. Naval Station Guantánamo Bay when lawful and necessary to protect the Nation” (Executive Order).¹²

In February 2019, U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton mentioned Gitmo in reference to President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela and his top advisors, publicly threatening that if they didn’t abandon their country and retire somewhere far away, they could end up in Guantánamo. Shortly thereafter, the Pentagon formally authorized the detention facility there to receive new detainees. This move was said to pave the way for 1,100 suspected ISIS fighters who were held by the U.S. in northeastern Syria to be transferred to the Caribbean.¹³ However, at the time of this writing, none of these transfers have taken place.

More recently, in June 2019, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen G. Breyer issued a statement expressing concerns about whether the U.S. Constitution permits the continued detention of Guantánamo detainees. Justice Breyer argued that it is “past time to confront the difficult question left open by

¹² See section two of Donald Trump’s January 30, 2018 executive order.

¹³ By most accounts, U.S. citizens are not considered candidates for transfer to Guantánamo Bay.

Hamdi,” making reference to the 2004 case *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld* (Breyer).¹⁴ This case allowed the U.S. president to detain certain enemy combatants at Guantánamo Bay, declaring that detention could in theory last forever, but it also warns that a shift in conditions on the ground could lead to the deauthorization of indefinite detention. The majority opinion, written by Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, warns, “[i]f the practical circumstances” of the War on Terror became “entirely unlike those of the conflicts that informed the development of the law of war,” the court’s “understanding” of what actions were authorized “may unravel” (*Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*).¹⁵

Justice Breyer hinted that the process of unraveling may have already begun in the case of Moath Hamza Ahmed Al-Alwi, a Yemeni national imprisoned for seventeen years. Like others, he is a “forever prisoner,” a detainee who purportedly can’t face charges but is too dangerous to be released due to the possibility of a return to “the battlefield.” Quoting again from Breyer’s statement, “[A]l-Alwi faces the real prospect that he will spend the rest of his life in detention based on his status as an enemy combatant a generation ago, even though today’s conflict may differ substantially from the one Congress anticipated.” However, this pronouncement doesn’t challenge the logic behind the law or its entrenchment in imperialist epistemology. In cases like this one, ethical intervention is held at bay, and legality constructs the other—the Muslim, the Arab, the terrorist—not as human but as an object of knowledge that opposes empathy.¹⁶ Al-Alwi’s actions suggest he might share this general view of the law. He resists his ongoing dehumanization, professing his innocence and going on hunger strikes that lead his captors to punish him with forced feeding. He describes his refusal to eat as “a form of peaceful protest against injustice” (Hussain, M.).

Recent events also revealed that Caribbean citizens have been kidnapped and subjected to indefinite detention at Guantánamo Bay, but the story was ignored by most if not all of the mainstream news sources in the U.S. In June 2019, the American Civil Liberties Union announced that four Jamaican fishermen who went out to sea in search of a catch had been apprehended by the U.S. Coast Guard and held incommunicado in official U.S. vessels, at

¹⁴ Yaser Esam Hamdi was a U.S. citizen when he was detained at Guantánamo Bay.

¹⁵ U.S. president Barack Obama declared the War on Terror over in May 2013, and the War in Afghanistan officially ended in December 2014. However, the court has not interpreted these events as reasons to deauthorize indefinite detention.

¹⁶ For a related discussion of empathy and the law, see Spivak 82–83.

least one of which docked at the naval base at Guantánamo Bay. The men also report being held on ships that docked in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. According to their attorney, the U.S. Coast Guard chained Robert Dexter Weir, Patrick Wayne Ferguson, Luther Fian Patterson, and David Roderick Williams to the decks of its ships for over a month, destroyed their property, left them exposed to the elements (even during a hurricane), denied them much-needed medical attention, and refused to let them contact their families to tell them that they were still alive.¹⁷ The account of these events that they offered suggests this was not an isolated case, as they were initially held alongside a large number of men. Indeed, the American Civil Liberties Union has argued that thousands have been abused in similar fashion.

In other periods, references to the base tended to coincide with important political events, for example, the U.S. presidential elections in which Bill Clinton and Barack Obama made “closing Guantánamo” a campaign promise, but recent news stories concerning the base are replete with deep-seated contradictions that reflect the normalization of violence.¹⁸ The military prison has become more entangled with realities of detention, war, and polemical political banter that verge on the absurd.

Political discourse about the base—what is happening there and what should be possible there—unfolds against the backdrop of macro-level patterns of interaction that date back centuries. This is evident in the racial identities of those who have been and continue to be detained in the various facilities within the base: Africans, Arabs, as well as people of Latin American and Afro-Caribbean ancestry. Several scholars have drawn attention to parallels between events of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the capture, transportation, and detention of suspects in the War on Terror. William Rowlandson, for example, observes that enslaved Africans as well as suspected Muslim terrorists apprehended in the wake of 9/11 were distinguished from their captors by language, culture, religion, and race, also noting that members of both groups were purchased, chained, bound, shackled, and subjected to sensory deprivation en route to Cuba. Probing the relevance of legal history, Nasser Hussain charges that U.S. government officials carefully studied the semantics of pre-9/11s law to continue “the legal decimation of personhood

¹⁷ See *Weir, Ferguson, Patterson, Williams v. United States of America and Admiral Karl L. Schultz*.

¹⁸ These plans equated closure with the emptying of facilities that were holding refugees and detainees by *transferring* them to other locations.

that began with slavery,” not only in the high security prison at Guantánamo, but also in mass round-ups and programs of preventative and indefinite detention that have operated domestically within the U.S. (743). Yogita Goyal argues that the exploration of this parallel is significant for the resonances that it reveals between nineteenth-century slave narratives and the history of colonial terror, on the one hand, and “transnational circuits of carcerality” and contemporary theories of slavery and freedom, on the other (87).

The Prison Today

Today forty Muslim men are imprisoned in various camps within the base’s detention facilities. Among them are men who were kidnapped and purchased by the U.S. military, survivors of psychological abuse and torture, and individuals who have never been informed precisely why they are detained, even though they have been held for well over a decade.¹⁹ Information about the conditions of their incarceration is limited, given that the U.S. government categorizes details about their confinement and many of the standard operating procedures that structure their lives as classified information. In fact, statements that are shared with journalists who visit the base are at times framed in such a way as to conform with policies that situate them from the perspective of soldiers, or in administrative language resembling Orwellian doublespeak. Nevertheless, numerous sources indicate that various forms of treatment that human rights advocates equate with abuse (all of which are authorized within the base) continue; among these are shackling, forced feeding, sleep deprivation, and solitary confinement. United Nations representatives and former prisoners have insisted that more serious forms of abuse also persist, rejecting the idea that a line can be drawn between the conditions of an “old Guantánamo” in which torture took place and a “new Guantánamo” in which prisoners are treated fairly. Both officers in charge of the facility and high-level representatives of the Pentagon have denied these claims.²⁰

¹⁹ This profile of the prison’s population has been created using numerous resources, among them Andy Worthington’s website *Close Guantánamo*, UN documents, Human Rights First press releases, the *New York Times*’ Guantánamo Docket, and statements authorized for public dissemination in a media tour organized by Joint Task Force Guantánamo.

²⁰ Such claims were made by Nils Melzer, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, in late 2017, as well as by the former Guantánamo prisoner Samir Naji al Hasan Moqbel, among others.

Five men among the current detainees, each of whom has been imprisoned for more than fifteen years, have been approved for release by the U.S. government. These men continue to be held even though six government agencies have signed off on their transfer. Given this volume's focus on the future, the vicious circle that they are caught up in, and our hope that they can soon be freed, we list their names alongside some details about them:

Al Yazidi, Ridah Bin Saleh
citizen of Tunisia, release approved 2007

Abdal Sattar, Muieen
citizen of United Arab Emirates, release approved 2010

Al Bihani, Tawfiq Nassar Ahmed
citizen of Saudi Arabia, release approved 2010

Barhoumi, Sufyian
citizen of Algeria, release approved 2016

Nasir, Abdul Latif
citizen of Morocco, release approved 2016

The transfer of these five individuals has the potential to trigger a broader reckoning with the past, one that contributes to changes in both how dominant institutions and members of the public at large envision justice, and the future of indefinite detention at Guantánamo Bay.

The prison also houses two men who have already been convicted of war crimes: Majid Khan and Ahmad Suliman Al Bahlul. Seven others have been charged in military commissions but not yet been brought to trial. The latter include Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of 9/11, and his six alleged co-conspirators. Three other men have been designated as men who should stand trial within the base.

The remaining twenty-three are sometimes called forever prisoners, a term used above in reference to the situation of Al-Alwi. According to the 2010 *Guantánamo Review Task Force Final Report*, the agencies and institutions responsible for their detention did not necessarily suspect that these men committed chargeable offenses. This document explains that men among the forever prisoners were targeted to prevent them from having

access to a battlefield, and so that they could provide the U.S. government with intelligence information (22).²¹

Among the forever prisoners is Hassan Mohammed Ali bin Attash, one of the twenty-two individuals who were juveniles at the time of their capture. Bin Attash was sixteen or seventeen then and has therefore spent all of his adult life behind bars, in flagrant violation of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.²²

Given that this volume is aligned with a call for a more ethical future, we also mention the names of the nine men who have lost their lives in the U.S. prison facilities at Guantánamo Bay: Ali Abdullah Ahmed, Mohammad Ahmed Abdullah Saleh al Hanashi, Abdul Rahman Maadha al-Amry, Awal Gul, Adnan Farhan Abdul Latif, Hajji Nassim, Abdul Razzaq Hekmati, Mana Shaman Allabardi al Tabi, and Yasser Talal al Zahrani. Their memory is honored in the final part of this volume.

Beyond the Pale

Will Guantánamo Bay's detention facilities and military prison emerge elsewhere? In recent years, some of the immigration policies and detention practices described above as violent have gained substantial traction in parts of the world far beyond the Caribbean, most notably, in Europe. However, opinions about whether they should be condemned or replicated are clearly divided. These positions tend to be contextualized by national and regional debates involving politics, power, and cultural ideologies rather than by networks that facilitate the exchange of information about the history of U.S. military's numerous migration detention initiatives involving the bay.

In Austria in 2016, for example, Sebastian Kurz, then Austria's foreign minister, suggested that Europe replicate the principles of "the Australia

²¹ This report was created in conjunction with President Barack Obama's promise to shutter the detention facility. Among the forever prisoners are ten from Yemen. Transfers of Yemeni have been deemed impossible due to its civil war, the lack of an appropriate rehabilitation program, and the lack of a third-country resettlement option. In at least one instance, these conditions have led Yemeni prisoners to be removed from the list of men eligible for transfer. See note 22 of the report.

²² The U.S. ratified the protocol of this international agreement in 2002. For a detailed overview of juvenile detention at Gitmo, see Worthington's discussion of detainee's ages.

migrant detention model,” but he misrepresented the latter’s history, likening the plan to “the Ellis Island model” rather than to its direct progenitor, the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay.²³ Politicians who have represented Austria’s far-right Freedom Party have repeatedly called for the construction of a Guantánamo-like complex either in Greece or on Italy’s southernmost island, Lampedusa.²⁴ They have also suggested that European authorities should implement a lesser-known Gitmo-inspired practice: the holding of migrants on ships until the state could determine “whether they deserved protection.” Significantly, critics of the proposal vocally rejected these plans, charging that the plan was to create “a Guantánamo” in Europe. In more than one instance, pressure has been substantial, and in some instances elected officials have been forced to state that another Guantánamo wasn’t the goal.

More recently, the government of Denmark designated the island of Lindholm, which is on its Baltic coastline, as the future home of up to 100 foreign criminals who have completed their sentences. Government plans have allocated over \$100 million to build an open prison for their detention on a site that currently houses animals with serious contagious diseases. The plans have generated significant local opposition, with concerned residents and human rights advocates alike charging that it will transform Lindholm Island into “Denmark’s Guantánamo.”²⁵ However, a spokesman for the Danish People’s Party openly embraced the comparison to facilities at Guantánamo, pointing out that the Lindholm prison was modeled after the Australian system of offshore detention.

The latter system, described in Ruth McHugh-Dillon’s essay in this volume, was modeled directly on the detention system that the U.S. operated for asylum seekers at Guantánamo Bay in the 1990s. At the time the new system was adopted in Australia in the early 2000s, the country’s politicians described the detention of unwanted migrants in the Cuban base as a success

²³ For evidence of these models and metaphors, see, for example, “Kurz: Rettung aus Seenot ist kein Ticket nach Europa.”

²⁴ An immigrant reception center that has operated at Lampedusa since 1998 has been the site of physical violence, severe overcrowding, and the deaths of large numbers of African migrants. For contrasting views of the facility, see “FPÖ will Gefängnis-Insel” and Rossi’s documentary *Fire at Sea*.

²⁵ See Ridgwell’s account and “UN Concerned over Denmark’s Plan to Banish Foreign Convicts to Deserted Island.”

story, paying little attention to the high rates of suicide and the prevalence of abuse, among other problems there.²⁶

High-ranking European Union politicians have also referenced Guantánamo facilities in public proclamations about the future, at times even promising to protect migrants' rights and avoid the institutionalization of systematic abuse. For example, in 2018, Dimitris Avramopoulos, the current E.U. Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs, and Citizenship, offered the following remark about plans for Frontex, the E.U.'s border and coast guard agency: "The European Union won't create a Guantanamo Bay for migrants. I'm against Guantanamo Bay for migrants, this is something that is against European values" (Avramopoulos). His words are commendable, especially considering the rise of Islamophobia and xenophobia in various parts of Europe, but journalists and human rights workers point to some of the same problems that shaped Guantánamo's past as a detention center in the facilities designed to hold African migrants who desperately want to reach Europe. Among these are lack of medical care, kidnapping, forced labor, torture, and forced repatriation.²⁷ Other reports provide details about the serious and seldom-discussed push factors that prompt migration, some of which resemble those motivating migration by people who were persecuted in Haiti in the 1990s.²⁸

We offer this review of events outside the Caribbean not as a complete analysis but as a sketch of some of the ways in which speech and texts interface with phenomena outside language use, particularly social relations, beliefs, and policies that are shaped by the actions of states. The asylum-seekers, refugees, migrants, and others (people whose predicaments defy categorization) too are impacted by Guantánamo Bay's historical weight. While members of these groups are seldom mentioned in discourses about

²⁶ Flynn identifies Guantánamo as "an important exemplar," noting that Australian parliamentary records show that Guantánamo was cited in proposals for a Pacific Solution aimed at interdicting vessels before they reached national waters and for detaining asylum seekers and migrants in offshore facilities located in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

²⁷ For details about these problems, see Taylor and the Human Rights Watch report "No Escape from Hell: EU Policies Contribute to Abuse in Libya."

²⁸ For documentation that facilitates the identification of similarities between these migrations, see "Tripoli Urban Migrants Situation Update 2."

Guantánamo in the European context, respect for their perspectives is crucial to the unfolding of a more peaceful and harmonious future. The late Cuban literary theorist Antonio Benítez Rojo would likely agree that those who seek to cross waterways and international borders to reach sanctuary today have a great deal in common with those whom he identifies as Peoples of the Sea, those who attempt—through real or symbolic sacrifice—to neutralize violence, those that are capable of seeking out and thriving in the paradoxical space of the poetic. Benítez Rojo describes the latter as a space to rest, a zone to dwell where “there is no desire other than that of maintaining oneself within [its] limits [. . .] for the longest possible time, in free orbit, beyond imprisonment or liberty” (17).

In this Issue

As Benitez Rojo’s words remind us, this issue of *Sargasso* would be incomplete without the inclusion of poetry. The work of Irene Vázquez and Amílcar Sanatan resonates with the long history of writing poetry in and about Guantánamo Bay, creating a space where empathy can flourish, mistakes can be forgiven, and new connections can be made.

This issue also includes two interviews, both with men who experienced life on the naval base first-hand, but under very different circumstances. In the first, José Sánchez Guerra and Don E. Walicek interview Lennox Lambert Farquard, a Cuban who worked on the base several decades ago, about his Jamaican background, his employment on the base, and his support for the Cuban Revolution. In the second interview, Alexandra S. Moore speaks with Mansoor Adayfi, who was detained within the prison between 2002 and 2016. Adayfi discusses his attempts to re-establish himself in Serbia as well as his creative work and his thoughts about the future.

In the first of the volume’s five essays, “Art, Ecology, and Repair: Imagining the Future of the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base,” Esther Whitfield considers two possible ways to imagine the future of the geography currently occupied by the base: one oriented around art and the other around science. Whitfield puts these two ways of knowing the world into dialogue, arguing that “creative work finds an analogue and potential ally in environmental conservation,” as both are undergirded by a fundamental “respect for life.” Both science and art, she suggests, working independently and together, create possibilities for

Guantánamo Bay to become the site of a productive acknowledgement and remembering of past wrongs that can lead to healing.

Next, Jorge Rodríguez Beruff's "U.S. Military Bases and Strategic Political Culture in Cuba" focuses on U.S. efforts to establish several bases in Cuba, including the one that currently occupies much of Guantánamo Bay, and its impact on Cuban political discourse. Rodríguez Beruff argues that "José Martí's views on the U.S. hegemonic pretensions during the War of Independence" evolved into a "nationalist discourse" that shaped the Cuban response to U.S. military demands that initially arose out of the Spanish-American War. Contemplating what might be next, he points out that any U.S. exit from Guantánamo Bay will have to be negotiated in the context of the political significance that the base has assumed both for Cuba and for the U.S.

In the third essay, "This Place Is Australia Itself": Manus, Guantánamo, and Embodied Literary Resistance in Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains*," Ruth McHugh-Dillon examines the relationship between the concept embodied by the U.S. prison at Guantánamo, Cuba, and Manus Island, a place belonging to Papua New Guinea that is sometimes called "the Australian Guantánamo." McHugh-Dillon focuses on Boochani's award-winning work, which was first written in Farsi via WhatsApp messages, exploring its significance as an extremely powerful and trenchant protest against patterns of inhumane detention and related abuses. Boochani remains imprisoned on Manus Island, occupying a space where justice remains highly elusive.

Like McHugh-Dillon, Diana Coleman considers "Guantánamo" as a complex signifier in the post-post-modern world in "On the Phobia of Hope and Everything After." Coleman examines how very difficult it is to imagine the future when one has been subjected to extreme injustice, including torture—and also how difficult it is to imagine a peaceful future from the perspective of the culture and society that has produced the terrifying phenomena that converge in the military prison at Guantánamo Bay. Her essay also discusses indicators suggesting that the U.S. government may be preparing to once again detain large numbers of migrants within the naval base.

In the final essay, "Guantánamo and the Limits of Circum-Caribbean Emancipation," Jessica Adams puts the imperial aggression of the Spanish-American War in dialogue with the nostalgia of the Lost Cause, the period

following Reconstruction in the U.S. that saw the romanticizing of slavery across the South. Considering how these historical moments are reflected in the present, her contribution examines connections between the U.S. base at Guantánamo Bay and Confederate monuments, a perhaps unexpected pairing that is nonetheless borne out by the historical record. Adams imagines what this locus within the circum-Caribbean intercultural may hold in the future.

The next contribution reflects the journal's interest in publishing original translations of Caribbean texts. It consists of our English-language translation of research by Guantánamo City's historian, José Sánchez Guerra. Our translation is an excerpt from his *Los Anglo-Caribeños en Guantánamo* (1902–1950) a book on Anglophone immigration to Cuba in the first part of the twentieth century that was published in 2004.

All of the reviews featured in this volume, most of which profile online resources, focus on Guantánamo Bay. They were done by students who completed the American Studies seminar “Guantánamo Bay: Ethics, Justice, and Hope” at the Karl-Franzens University of Graz in the summer of 2019.

As mentioned briefly above, this volume also includes a section remembering the nine Muslim prisoners who lost their lives within the base. Titled “In Memoriam: *Salaam*,” this modest memorial has been designed to resemble those that people in Puerto Rico publish in local newspapers to honor the lives of deceased family members, friends, and loved ones.

Salaam, the Arabic word for peace, resonates with the image on the front cover of this volume, a watercolor by Cuban poet Regino E. Boti y Barreiro (1878–1958). Palm trees, the subject of this painting, represent hospitality and an end to conflict, both in the Caribbean and in Middle Eastern cultures. Boti y Barreiro, one of Guantánamo Province's most significant writers, also painted the image of Guantánamo Bay included on the volume's back cover.

A heartfelt thank you to all of the peer reviewers, authors, and others who have contributed to this volume. We also thank Keishla González for the work that she completed in the journal's office during the period of its production. In addition, we're grateful to Katherine Miranda, Alicia Pousada, Belén Sotomayor Ortiz, Maritza Stanchich, and Rosa Guzzardo Tamargo for the ways in which they have supported *Sargasso* in recent months. Jorge Núñez Motes, president of the Guantánamo City chapter of the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, provided the images for this volume's covers. We thank him for making it possible to include this artwork.

What's next? Possible futures, past and present, are discussed in the pages ahead, as we claim knowledge and the imagination as transformative.

Thinking about what Guantánamo should be and what it can't be are related to what will be next. This stance assists us in reconsidering the premises underlying the present order of things, and in advancing what Sylvia Wynter calls "restructuring." Molding visions of humanism around the contours of this complex place, restructuring undermines epistemological imperialism, a set of forces that Wynter identifies as allowing the "ruling ideas" behind dehumanization to be "cast in sanitized terms" (Scott 159-168).²⁹ We return to Wynter and close with her words not to mark an end, but to echo ideas that can lead to the embodiment of tomorrows that differ from the here and now.

²⁹ Wynter argues that epistemology mandates the political order. See her comments in the interview with her conducted by Scott.

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POETRY

POETRY BY IRENE VÁZQUEZ*

Hail Mary

Dios te salve,
María, can you hear me
from down here? Yo me llamo llorona,
fantasma, la prieta, negrita; I've given you all
I have, my pidgin English, my broken
Spanish, my filthy words. I've walked on my knees,
repenting, drank the whole
desert. This is how
I am lost — intentionally
and brutally.
I speak of tangled hair,
of beaches, of a heartbreak so particular
that I had to confess.
I beg for transubstantiation,
for peace.
Dios nos salve,
yo me llamo María tambien, and I'm tired
of giving.
Wherefore art thou, Black
Madonna? My phone once

* Ekphrastic in nature, these two poems respond to Spanish casta paintings: “Hail Mary” is based on Luis de Mena’s “Virgin of Guadalupe and castas” and “Habeas Corpus” is based on José Joaquín Magón’s “La Mulatta.”

autocorrected mulatto to milagro,
and I haven't felt holy since.
I don't know what it means to be free
in the middle of the ocean, but I'm desperate
to see the Atlantic again.
Anoint me
at the site of my first defeat.
All I ask for
is the ability to inhabit my body,
but I can't get a text back.

Habeas Corpus

that you have the body, this body that
was a place to belong,
which turned molten just as it always
said it would, it just became harder
to love, that you desired
desirability, that you couldn't leave
your Blackness at home, that your jeans stopped
fitting, that your body kept
insisting, that you began to see visions, to vomit
color, that you keep thinking of your professor's lecture
on the afterlives of slavery, the one where she outlined
how Black women were for labor
mixed women were for sex,
and white women were for marriage, that you possess a kit of parts,
that your mother called you
sturdy, that you called yourself capable,
that you sang
of a marble form, that you stood
your ground, that you dreamed
up these curves, that you yearned it
into flesh hood, that you wanted to return
it to sender, that you were vivisected, just
alive enough, that these borders have always been infinitely breachable,
that they called you mulatta, morena, that you can't dance without
tension crawling through your body
that you will sleep
it off, that you will sleep
it off, that you will sleep again, that your looks
do indeed kill, that you are not held
against your will, that you are a living will

Erotics of La Parda

How to escape
the supplication of this body, to stand
the fuck back up. How to spell
s-e-l-f. How to tell you
desire feels like a dangerous
miracle. How to say, *just keep me
warm through this endless
winter*. How to resist the violence
of insisting my innocence. How to text you
after midnight, how to say *I know
we haven't been talking but I saw you
at the protest*. How to ask for
enough oxygen to breathe in. How to close
these endless
distances. How to say *just set me
on fire*. How to balance
the chemistry of precarity and all this fucking
want. How to face all this devastating
catastrophe.
How when we love, they name us
insurgency. How they call everything
our bodies touch looting,
including each other. How to find
a line that will stick to the abyss, how the only thing
that feels solid is the memory of your hand
pulling me back into bed. How to break it down,
subject, verb, object. How to be an impossible thing
desiring the impossible. Como me dicen
no te entiendo. No te veo.
No te quiero ver.

POETRY BY AMÍLCAR SANATAN

Since 1898

Always, unnatural
continental drifts in geopolitics

Long after Columbus arrived
in the name of Isabella of Spain,
another Columbus stumbled by military sail
discovered us desolate, penetrable
claimed new territory to gift a *motherland*
inhaled our trees and *otherness*
tortured our bodies for the weight of oil
and *national security*
as their greed once did for gold.

Now the tides breach
beaches, converted tropical fortresses,

half-baked dreams of US Democratic Party
politics, still fail to stop
a chain of islands and an America spitting
in the wind

Imperialism is a reputation
that cannot be rescued.

Little Boats

By little boats they braved seas of memory
fleeing the tyranny of Duvalier's dynasty

never welcome here, shouts from all sides,
silence is refugee, freedom capsizes

they do not know that they are spectating,
tragic rehearsals, our continued acting

first, black, revolution, names they carry
in a hemisphere that ensured no land,
not even theirs, is sanctuary

Sovereignty

As long as Guantanamo
lives

somewhere
in our geography

somewhere
in our history

another Chaguaramas base
of superiority

seas will rise
blood red
and wash
yankee landfill
in our backyards

as predictable as repeating waves
of sovereignty.

INTERVIEWS

'YO HE CAMINADO UN POCO': ENTREVISTA CON LENNOX LAMBERT FARQUARD*

José Sánchez Guerra
Casa de la Historia, Ciudad de Guantánamo

Don E. Walicek
Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras

11 de diciembre de 2016
Ciudad de Guantánamo, Cuba

Resumen

En esta entrevista del 2016, Lennox Lambert Farquand discute algunas de sus experiencias como empleado de la Base Naval de la Bahía de Guantánamo. Un cubano de ascendencia jamaicana, trabajó en la base por un total de 19 años, desde que tenía 16. Visitó varios puertos del Caribe como empleado de la base, interactuó con numerosos visitantes famosos y formó amistades con oficiales estadounidenses estacionados en la base. Los eventos que llevaron a la Revolución cubana politizaron a Lambert Farquand y este asistió en el contrabando de bienes y suministros que entregaba a los rebeldes que apoyaban el movimiento liderado por Fidel Castro. Luego dejó su posición en la base abruptamente después de que lo detuvieron e interrogaron allí.

Palabras clave: cubanos de ascendencia jamaicana, la base naval en Guantánamo, la Revolución cubana, política cubana del siglo XX

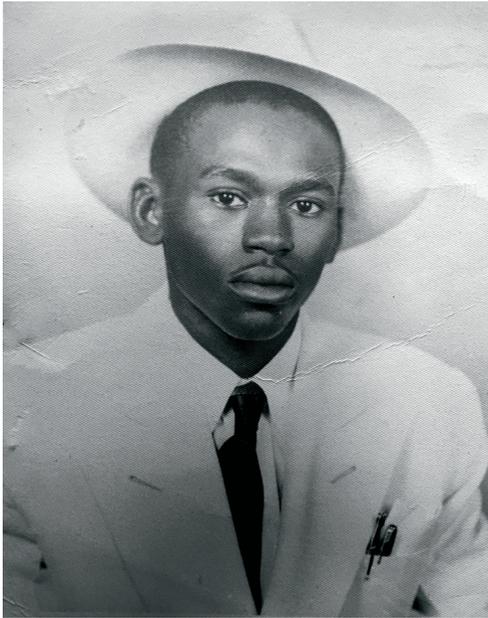
Abstract

In this 2016 interview, Mr. Lennox Lambert Farquand discusses some of his experiences working as an employee in the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay. A Cuban of Jamaican ancestry, he worked in the base for a total

* Iván A. Cruz Rodríguez y Fabiola Mattei transcribieron partes de esta entrevista. Dado a la repetición en la transcripción original y las limitaciones de espacio en este volumen, algunos segmentos han sido omitidos. Otros fueron editados y reordenados durante el proceso editorial para contribuir a la cohesión de la narrativa.

of nineteen years, starting at the age of sixteen. He visited various Caribbean ports as a base employee, interacted with numerous famous visitors, and formed friendships with American officers who were stationed there. Events leading up to the Cuban Revolution politicized Lambert Farquard, and he assisted in smuggling out goods and supplies that he delivered to rebels who supported the movement led by Fidel Castro. Later he abruptly left his position in the base after he was detained and interrogated there.

Keywords: Cubans of Jamaican ancestry, Guantánamo Bay naval base, Cuban Revolution, twentieth-century Cuban politics



Lennox Lambert Farquard, alrededor de 1940



Lennox Lambert Farquard, 2016

Lennox Lambert Farquard: Yo nací aquí en Cuba. Mi nombre es Lennox Lambert. Cuando trabajé en la base, mi apellido era Lennox Lambert Lambert, pero yo tuve que rectificar porque no llevaba el apellido de mi mamá. Entonces yo realmente ahora soy Lennox Lambert Farquard.

Don E. Walicek: ¿Usted nació en Guantánamo?

LLF: No. Yo nací en San Germán, ahora Urbano Noris, municipio de Holguín. 1926.

José Sánchez Guerra: 90 años . . .

LLF: 90 y pico. 22 de enero, nací, entonces me crié en San Germán. Mi papá y mi mamá eran jamaicanos. Ellos vinieron a Cuba en el 24, yo soy el primer hijo de 6, de 5. Yo soy el mayor. Entonces, radicaban en San Germán. Cuando yo no había llegado a los 16 le dije a mi papá que yo necesitaba ir a ayudar a crear misceláneas [tiendas de esquina]. Fue por la situación económica. Entonces donde único había trabajo era en la base naval americana.

Entonces mi papá me dijo que no, que estaba muy joven para eso. Entonces yo dije: “No, yo me voy” y decidí pero como mi mamá me enseñó un poco inglés, pude, y a los 30 días conseguí trabajo en la base y empecé, ahí empecé a trabajar. Aprendí a trabajar.

JSG: ¿El nombre de su padre es? ¿A qué se dedicaba él?

LLF: Palde, Palde Lambert. Palde Augustos Lambert. Era mecánico.

JSG: ¿No trabajó en la base él?

LLF: No, no. Mi mamá era Grace Ann, cuando se casó era Farquard pero al casarse pierde su apellido y coge el de Lambert.

DEW: ¿Qué edad tenía su padre cuando vino para Cuba, más o menos?

LLF: Era joven, 20 años más o menos. Qué pasa, ellos eran de un lugar en Jamaica, una provincia que se llama Saint Ann’s Bay, que está a 11 kilómetros más o menos de Ocho Ríos. Ya yo fui allí 6 veces. Un sobrino mío está en



Navy Exchange en la base naval de Guantánamo, 1949

Ocho Ríos. Bien, la base . . .

DEW: ¿Usted empezó a trabajar en la base en qué año?

LLF: En el diciembre 2, de 1942, durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial, empecé a trabajar ahí. Casualmente tuve que esconder mi edad porque yo tuve que decir que tenía 17. Pero por el inglés y la necesidad de trabajar que yo tenía me ubicaron en seguida. Comencé trabajando como mozo de limpieza en 6 o 7 casitas de los pilotos de barcos americanos, los que conducen los barcos hacia la bahía, los entran y los sacan. Entonces yo trabajaba con ellos.

JSG: ¿Cuánto ganaba cuando comenzó?

LLF: Ahí 30 dólares mensuales, en aquél momento eran unos pocos de pesos, \$30. Pero al estar ahí un tiempo, hubo necesidad para trabajadores naturalmente cubanos en la tienda comercial. Me hablaron a mí porque ya dominaba un poco de inglés y porque ya entendía un poco también la forma americana, porque ahí yo no puedo esconder eso, yo aprendí a trabajar con ellos. Entonces, hicieron la gestión para que yo fuera a trabajar al Navy Exchange. El Navy Exchange es una tienda de intercambios, de comercial. Ahí empecé como jefe de almacén. Allí fue en el 44, tengo la fecha por ahí.



Tienda adentro de la base naval de Guantánamo, alrededor de 1949

JSG: ¿Cuánto ganaba entonces?

LLF: Ahí ganaba . . . no me recuerdo exactamente, pero después pasé ahí mismo me superé y pasé al primer jefe de esa tienda sucursal. Ahí yo ganaba \$130 mensual, quincenal. [. . .] Sí ya, ya. Y yo trabajé ahí, bueno, ahí empecé en el 44, en la tienda. Ahí fui desarrollándome y tuve varios jefes que tengo los nombres por ahí, americanos que me han dejado recomendaciones, y ya viajé de ahí a Puerto Príncipe como 14 veces en programas de comercio.

DEW: ¿Un programa de comercio?

LLF: Sí, compra y venta de productos en la tienda americana. Compraba afuera para vender acá en lo que es el Navy Exchange. Siempre iba . . . íbamos por la mañana. Íbamos a Haití, Puerto Rico, Jamaica en aquellos años, hasta el año 57 creo que es.

DEW: ¿Y qué compraron?

LLF: Comprábamos en Haití productos hechos de madera, madera preciosa, muchos objetos de carey. Compraban mucho allá y cosas de *souvenir*. Madera, ajá hecho en cabezas de animales, figuras, cabezas de caballo, librerías, todas esas cosas. Había demanda de eso. Mucha demanda, fundamentalmente de Haití [Puerto Príncipe] pero también de Jamaica y de Puerto Rico. Venían los barcos americanos, venían de Puerto Rico o iban para afuera del Caribe, todo el mundo entraba por ahí, así que era un lugar que había mucha venta. Teníamos unos cuantos trabajadores cubanos como dependientes. Tengo fotos ahí y tengo americanos y americanas que trabajaban conmigo. Yo era el jefe.

JSG: Para tener una idea, ¿más o menos qué volumen de venta tenían al año?

LLF: Bueno, mensualmente se podía hablar de 120 000 dólares y entonces.

JSG: ¿Y también compraron alimento, no?

LLF: No, alimento no, porque el alimento venía de EE. UU. En eso ellos suministraban. Entonces, en esa forma estuve trabajando, viajando [cerca] hasta el año 57, pero entonces Fidel desembarca y la vida empieza a cambiar.

DEW: Y durante el tiempo de ir a Haití y las otras islas, ¿usted vivía en la base?

LLF: No. Yo tenía mi albergue en la base, pero yo vivía en Caimanera.¹

DEW: Entonces cada día había un proceso de salir y entrar.

LLF: Todos los días. Yo tenía mi pase, todos los días se entraba y salía. Incluso yo tenía mi carro que yo podía entrar por la frontera, tenía un pase. Entonces entrábamos por la frontera, entrabas por la frontera.

JSG: ¿Por Boquerón?

¹ Caimanera es un pueblo en la provincia de Guantánamo. Tradicionalmente un pueblo pesquero, está localizado en la costa oeste de la bahía de Guantánamo, muy cerca de la base naval estadounidense. Las vidas de sus residentes han sido impactadas repetidamente por su proximidad a la base.

LLF: Por Boquerón, sí. Entraba y salía por la puerta allá. Eso era todos los días.

La Segunda Guerra Mundial

JSG: Lambert, ¿usted empezó a trabajar en la base en la Segunda Guerra Mundial?

LLF: En la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

JSG: ¿Cuántos cubanos trabajaban aproximadamente ahí? Hable sobre las construcciones, ¿qué es lo que usted vio?

LLF: En aquel tiempo, cuando yo empecé, había una empresa americana que se llamaba Snare and Co. Ésa era la compañía que estaba desarrollando la base para trabajar y trabajaban 6, 7 u 8,000 trabajadores. Ahora, ellos siempre venían buscando trabajadores de especialidad o algo de eso a Caimanera. Venían en una lancha rápida, llegaban a los muelles de Caimanera [el muelle está ahí todavía] y ahí había cientos de cubanos ahí esperando que vinieran a buscar gente. Y ahí ellos se llevaban [...] pedían mecánicos, pedían especialidad, y se los llevaban para la base y los empleaban, en aquel tiempo trabajaba mucha gente. Snare and Co. creo que se llamaban.

JSG: ¿Había mucho jamaiquino ya trabajando?

LLF: Sí, de aquí de Guantánamo. Muchos hijos de jamaiquinos y mucho jamaicano también trabajaban en la base.

JSG: Digamos de cada diez trabajadores, ¿cuántos eran jamaiquinos? Más o menos, para tener una idea.

LLF: ¿De cada diez cuántos eran jamaicanos? Se puede decir que un 40%.

JSG: O sea, el 60% cubano y el 40 jamaicano.

LLF: Sí, sí. Alto. Y establecidos en Guantánamo.

DEW: ¿Por qué tantos jamaiquinos?

LLF: Bueno porque salieron de Jamaica. ¿Qué buscaba el americano? A las personas que hablaban inglés, y entonces [llegaba] el jamaicano y le pagaban barato también.

JSG: Sí. Discriminación racial en esa época, ¿usted vio alguna?

LLF: Bueno, yo he caminado un poco. Antes les dije a ustedes que yo viajé a Puerto Príncipe, Haití, Jamaica... cerca de 14 veces. Después del triunfo de la Revolución, que yo salí de la base, yo viajé 6 veces. Pero estando trabajando en la base tuve la oportunidad de que me invitaran a ir a los EE. UU. en tres ocasiones, en tres ocasiones. Con trabajo y para quedarme pero [...]

DEW: ¿Como una mudanza completa entonces?

LLF: Sí. Completa. Querían que yo fuera a vivir y trabajar en EE. UU. Los jefes míos americanos me querían mucho, yo tengo los nombres y todo eso ahí. Entonces me invitaron para que yo cogiera mis vacaciones fuera a los EE. UU., ver el trabajo que me consiguen y dónde iba a parar. Pero yo nunca acepté por dos razones: en primer lugar por el problema del racismo que estaba en pleno desarrollo entonces en los EE. UU. Ustedes han oído hablar del Ku Klux Klan, ¿entiende? [. . .] También tuve una enamorada que me invitó para irme pero yo no fui. En segundo lugar fue el frío que yo no lo aguanto.

Cuando hablo del racismo, en aquel tiempo yo leía mucho sobre lo que estaba pasando en los EE. UU. yo no sé, ustedes son más jóvenes. Ahí viene una guagua, hay un negro sentado en un asiento y sube un blanco y mira, y ve que no hay asiento vacío y le dice al negro: “*Get up!* ¡Levántate!” Tiene que darle el asiento. Eso, creo que ustedes conocen algo de eso. Eso fue muy terrible.

DEW: ¿En la base eso pasaba?

LLF: En la base eso se veía, pero muy poco. ¿Por qué? Porque yo digo que yo tuve varios jefes y yo podía ir a sus casas, entrar a sus casas. Me invitaban, naturalmente, yo tenía un cargo, ¿me entiendes? ¿Pero en la base dónde se veía mucho? Cuando la fuerza de trabajadores entraba y salía por la lancha, por el puerto. Un día íbamos saliendo y no recuerdo exactamente qué pasó, pero oí que un oficial le dijo: “*You black son of a bitch!*” Quiere decir que todavía, entre algunos, había ese problema.

JSG: ¿Qué le dijeron?

LLF: “¡Negro comemierda hijo de puta!” Entonces, yo he tenido cinco o seis jefes americanos y no he podido hablar mal de ninguno porque todos, todos me respetaban. Primero yo empecé a trabajar como mozo de limpieza en las casas de los pilotos.

¿Qué me llamaba mucho la atención? Ellos jugaban mucho, tomaban mucho. Bebidas fuertes. Cervezas también. Yo los atendía en un comedor, pero en cuanto voy a limpiarles la casa siempre había plata, monedas, tiradas en el suelo, en el asiento y yo soy el que tengo que limpiar y yo limpiaba. Yo tenía 17 o 18 años, no tenía maldad tampoco. Entonces yo limpiaba y recogía toda esa plata que yo encontraba en cualquiera de los cuartos y se lo ponía en la mesa.

JSG: Se ganó el respeto, la confianza de ellos.

LLF: Bueno pero yo no es que [...] yo digo: “Eso no es mío, eso es de usted”. Y un día ellos vienen al comedor todos ellos y me dice uno de ellos, el jefe, y me dice: “Lennox, hay una plata que está en la mesa, eso es suyo” y le digo: “No, eso yo lo recogí de allá de adentro. Yo lo recogí en los asientos y eso” y dice: “Sí, pero eso es suyo”.

JSG: Bueno, en lo que usted observó, en los que trabajaban en los muelles y en lo demás, ¿trabajaban jamaicanos y cubanos? ¿En la Segunda Guerra Mundial?

LLF: Sí. [...] El cuerpo de bomberos era mayormente de cubanos y jamaicanos. Trabajaban en los hospitales, trabajaban en lo que le decían ‘ship repairs’, donde reparan los barcos, trabajaban cubanos, muchos cubanos. En distintos departamentos trabajaban muchos cubanos.

DEW: Y en la base, como en la Segunda Guerra Mundial estaba pasando, escuchaban la radio. ¿Leyeron periódicos en inglés? Porque había muchos periódicos, ¿no?

LLF: Había un periódico que se publicaba en la base: *Papous*. *El Papous*, yo no sé, tengo dos por ahí. *El Papous* hablaba de las cosas más importantes

incluso yo me quedé con uno que está por ahí, que daban clases de español a los americanos. *El Papous* es el que más se publicaba.

JSG: Yo oí decir que cerca de la entrada de la bahía hundieron un submarino alemán en la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

LLF: Yo lo oí como lo oyó usted. Yo no tengo prueba de eso. Pero dicen que sí, entró un submarino alemán y lo hundieron ahí, pero yo tengo entendido que lo hundieron frente a Boquerón. Entró a Boquerón y que era un submarino espía hasta que lo descubrieron.

JSG: ¿[Hubo] un sabotaje dentro de la base?

LLF: Sabotaje. . . El problema era los alemanes, la Segunda Guerra Mundial, pero con los cubanos no.

Relaciones familiares

DEW: ¿Y usted logró enviar, cómo se dice, remesas a la familia? Empezamos con el tema de la familia, ¿no? Me pregunto si usted compartió algunas de las ganancias con su familia.

LLF: Ayer yo estaba hablando con un compañero mío y le digo que estaba recordando a mi papá porque yo fui a trabajar para poder ayudar a mi papá. Yo trabajaba en la base para poder ayudar a mi papá a criar a mis otros hermanos, éramos 5. Y cuando empecé en la base yo empecé también limpiando zapatos, trabajando de mozo de limpieza, 30 pesos, y limpiando zapatos. Así que yo ganaba más limpiando zapatos que el salario que ganaba. Todo eso. Yo no tenía que pagar comida allí en la base. Todo eso yo se lo mandaba a mi familia y así estuve casi hasta ¿qué año? Ya cuando triunfa la Revolución, mi papá, mi mamá y mis hermanos se fueron para La Habana a vivir, se fueron de San Germán para allá. Pero todo el mundo vivía en un cuartico así como aquí, dormían en el suelo.

Pero pasados unos años que yo estoy mandando esa pequeña ayuda que, en aquel tiempo, significaba mucho, mi papá para un fin de año, que no preciso cuál era el año, me dice que yo debo de ir a verlos, a visitarlos a ellos, pero

yo no iba a ningún lugar, no gastaba, con tal de ayudarlo. [Me decía] Que no puedo dejar de ir a San Germán para ese fin de año. Y yo decía: “Oye, y cuál será el problema de mi papá, mi mamá y mis hermanos, que mi papá me está insistiendo que yo debo ir”. Ayer se lo estaba contando a un compañero.

Cuando yo llego veo a mi mamá cocinando pollo, veo cerveza, veo ron. Mi papá contento conmigo y se sienta conmigo mi papá y me dice: “No quiero que mandes un centavo más para acá porque la situación económica aquí en la casa ha cambiado”. Dice: “Todo el mundo está trabajando y mira, ya estamos bajo techo”. Eso me hablaba mi papá.

Ayer yo le dije a un compañero: si yo tuviera que nacer otra vez, no quisiera tener otro padre, más que ese. Entonces dice: “Quiero que sepa que usted me ha sustituido como padre”, me dijo. Dice: “Me siento muy orgulloso de ti”. Estas palabras así nunca se me olvidan. Y me dice él: “Lo único que te voy a pedir [es que] nunca manches mi apellido”. Y, si hay alguna vez en mi vida que yo pensaba hacer algo malo, él viene a mi mente: “Nunca hagas nada malo”. Bien, él murió a los 68 años. Mi mamá murió a los 93. Están enterrados en Guanabacoa. [. . .]

Visitas importantes

JSG: ¿Usted recuerda alguna visita importante en la base, en la SGM? Ahí estuvo Roosevelt pero estuvo antes. Pero Truman estuvo.

LLF: Yo atendí [a] Nat King Cole. Sí, en los 50, eso es en los 50. Como yo era el jefe de la tienda, allá los americanos me decían: “Ah Lambert, hay que armar para vender *souvenirs* y cosas a las comitiva”. Entonces ellos tienen un club que se llama el Club de los Chief. Ese club a pesar de que yo trabajé ahí también pero ahí yo armaba en una sala las cosas que necesitaban comprar, *souvenirs* y todo eso. Ellos lo que querían era mucho *souvenir*. Y el cine donde él tocó al aire libre, no sé cómo sea hoy. Y ahí bueno, lo atendí a él.

También yo atendí, estando el jefe de la tienda que te dije, el Navy Exchange, al famoso escritor americano Ernest Hemingway. Conversamos mucho. Cuando Hemingway regresó del África que por poco se lo come un león allá, él me contó todo eso. Él vino a la base y allí él tenía las botas de él que había

que repararlas. Yo tenía un departamento que tenía un zapatero bueno, de aquí de Guantánamo era también. Brown de apellido.

Y entonces, Hemmingway sentado nos conversaba de su odisea allá en el África y cuando él se escapó del león que le cayó atrás y él pudo subir él nos enseñó en aquel momento una foto de un árbol, un árbol que tiene una casita arriba. Entonces dice que cuando se subió ahí que se salvó. Yo hablé con él bastante de eso.

Como personal famoso yo atendí la comitiva del presidente Truman.² En el mismo Club de los Chief yo armé ahí para que pudieran comprar. A la comitiva de Truman.

DEW: ¿Cómo llegó el presidente Truman a la base?

LLF: Entonces, él en aquel entonces fue en un yate Williamsburg. El yate Williamsburg estuvo en la base. Un yate muy lindo.

DEW: Sí. Creo que habían ido a Puerto Rico justamente antes de llegar a la base. Dicen que se enfermó por el movimiento, *seasick* ¿no? ¿De camino para la base?

LLF: Ah sí, sí. Fue por el movimiento.

JSG: ¿Y qué otra visita? ¿Batista, que estuvo en los años 50?³

LLF: Batista estuvo ahí. Batista estuvo en la base; Batista y su comitiva.

² Entre 1950 y 1953, la administración de Truman casi triplicó sus gastos de defensa como porcentaje del producto interno bruto de los EE. UU. (desde 5 hasta 14.2 %) *Young, Ken (Winter 2013). "Revisiting NSC 68". Journal of Cold War Studies. 15 (1): 3–33. Ver pp. 3–4, 10–11.*

³ Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar gobernó Cuba entre 1952 y 1959. Mientras su administración autoritaria recibía apoyo financiero, militar y logístico de los EE. UU., Batista suspendió la constitución de 1940 y revocó la mayoría de las libertades políticas de los ciudadanos cubanos. Alineado con los terratenientes azucareros más poderosos del país, presidió sobre una economía en estancamiento durante un periodo en el cual la brecha entre los cubanos ricos y pobres se ensanchó de manera significativa. Para reprimir el descontento, Batista censuró los medios y usó su policía secreta para llevar a cabo violencia a grande escala, incluyendo tortura y ejecuciones públicas.

JSG: Creo que fue en el 54. Tengo la fecha por ahí.

LLF: Yo no tengo la fecha. Pero sé que él estuvo ahí y ya se estaba desarrollando la lucha revolucionaria. Y recuerdo, no tengo el nombre de él ahora, el cajero; él era revolucionario del 26. Porque había muchos que eran revolucionarios pero no pertenecían al 26.⁴

JSG: Eran del directorio.

Murmullos revolucionarios

LLF: Sí. Bueno y recuerdo que él era el cajero mío. Tenía su cuartico con seguro y él tenía un arma. Él es de apellido Oslé, de toda esa gente Oslé. Así que entraron ahí a la tienda, compraron sin problemas, pero yo no sé nada de lucha todavía. Dice, después que se fueron, me dice: “Oye, yo tenía instrucción de tirarles”.

“¿Cómo que tú vas a venir a tirar aquí? Tú tiras aquí y no sales de aquí más nunca!” Entonces él era del 26 y ellos estaban comentando que cómo llegó tan cerca de ellos, Batista y su comitiva. Él se fue para los EE. UU. hace muchos años. Yo no sé si está vivo.

JSG: ¿Quién acompañó a Batista?

LLF: Batista tuvo bastante gente. Hubo un alcalde de aquí, Fermín Morales, era alcalde. Él estaba con él. Había un grupo de gente. Pues él, a él personalmente no lo atendí. Tiene que decir [en los periódicos] porque eso salía en *El Papous*.

DEW: ¿El cajero revolucionario Oslé había recibido instrucciones para tirar?

LLF: No sé. Él lo que sí comentó [fue] como él llegó tan cerca de él, estaba armado y no se atrevió. Si él de verdad recibió o no, yo no lo sé. En ese tiem-

⁴ “El 26” o el Movimiento 26 de Julio (M-26-7) fue una organización política y militar cubana creada en 1953 por un grupo liderado por Fidel Castro. A fines de 1956 estableció una base guerrillera en la Sierra Maestra que terminó venciendo a las tropas de Fulgencio Batista.

po todavía yo siendo jefe de comercio pero sentía por la Revolución pero no desarrollaba tareas de la Revolución porque yo era el jefe.

¿Pero cómo yo sentía la Revolución? Los veía pero no estaba dentro de mí porque no había algo que me llamó. Hasta que un día vi una foto que es la que sale en la prensa. Esta foto [muestra foto] donde estaba Raúl, Fidel y Almeida. Yo no sé si usted se acordará que la campaña de Batista y los soldados decían que estos eran problemas que no tenían que ver con negros.

¿No hubo una campaña de eso? Entonces cuando yo vi la foto yo digo: “¿Cómo es posible que digan que esto no tiene que ver con negros? Y mira un negro ahí”. Almeida. Y ahí es donde yo empiezo a sentir y a actuar con la Revolución.⁵

Radio Rebelde

LLF: La foto de *Bohemia* que salió con Fidel con el fusil con Almeida, con Juan Almeida y con Raúl, que Raúl se paró así. Oye, pero cuando veo eso empiezo a coger noticias por radio.

Ya yo vivía aquí en Santa Rita entre 6 y 7 sur. Ya yo vivía ahí, ya yo tenía a mi familia, mi primer hijo. Ahí yo empecé a coger con un radiecito portátil a ver si podía coger Radio Rebelde, porque todo el mundo hablaba de Fidel en la Sierra pero bueno, Radio Rebelde. Hasta que una noche, como a las 9, me salió: “¡Aquí Radio Rebelde!” Y yo, sin saber, acuérdate que esto estaba ocupado por los cristianos. Yo sin percatarme [le] grite a mi mujer: “¡Oye ya lo cogí, ya lo cogí, Radio Rebelde!” Pero al final del fondo de la casa yo no sé quién es que vive ahí. Al otro día por la mañana, me llama mi mujer y me dice: “Ahí te busca un guardia”.

⁵ Juan Almeida Bosque (1927-2009) fue uno de los líderes originales de la Revolución cubana de 1959 y la única persona de ascendencia africana entre ellos. Participó en el asalto del cuartel Moncada en Santiago en 1953 y luego fue aprisionado con los hermanos Castro en la Isla de Pinos (ahora Isla de la Juventud). En 1959, este y otros fueron indultados por Batista. Al momento de su muerte era el vicepresidente del Consejo de Estado de Cuba. Su participación en la lucha armada ha sido un símbolo importante y ha representado para muchos un compromiso con romper con la discriminación racial.

JSG: Un chivatazo.⁶

LLF: Me dice: "Ahí te busca alguien". Digo: "¿A mí?" "Sí". Pero como ya yo tengo mis niñas, sí, yo voy con la niña. Se acerca para el corredor y me dice: "¿Usted es el que vive aquí? Y yo: "Sí". Me dice: "Ah". Me miró, miró a la niña y, ¿tú sabes quién era? Agüero. Usted ha oído hablar de él ¿no?

JSG: Un criminal, sargento Agüero.

LLF: Sargento Agüero, criminal. Criminal número uno. Y entonces, ¿cómo él se entera? Es porque se lo dijeron porque él tenía una amistad al fondo de la casa y oyó mis gritos.

Nelson

LLF: [. . .]. De ahí yo seguí trabajando en la base pero había un club que era de las gradas donde está el puente. El Riverside Club, yo tengo fotos de eso ahí. Cuando veníamos de la base, parqueábamos ahí, tomábamos cerveza antes de irme para la casa, un grupo de trabajadores de la base. Hasta que una tarde, ya tarde, ahí había un servicentro. Viene Agüero con su chofer Nelson a echar gasolina. Yo estoy tomando con un grupo de trabajadores de la base, que lo hacíamos todas las tardes antes de irnos para las casas. Y llega un trabajador y me dice: "Oye Lambert, te está llamando Agüero". Y yo: "A mí o..." "Sí, sí a usted mismo". Y yo: "¿Conmigo?"

JSG: ¿Te reconoció?

LLF: Sí. Pero, ¿cuál es el problema? Éste es el chofer que se llamaba Nelson. No me acuerdo del apellido, Nelson. [A] Nelson lo fusilamos por asesino también. Nelson era el chofer de él. Nelson venía de vez en cuando, venía y tomaba con nosotros. Ese día que Agüero me está llamando y le digo a la gente [con la] que estoy tomando: "No sé para qué él me está llamando".

Voy allá. Cuando llego adonde él esté, Nelson está donde usted está. Agüero está delante de él, y me dice: "¿Usted domina inglés?" Y yo: "Sí". "Usted tiene

⁶ Un chivatazo se define como la acción propia de un delator (chivato).

que ir con nosotros a entregar unos marinos allá a la frontera porque tú hablas inglés”, y yo le dije a él que yo no podía. Y dice él: “No pero es que usted tiene que ir”. “Pero, ¿cuál es el problema?” El Nelson, que está detrás de él, me hacía así [gesto de “no, no, no” con la mano].

JSG: ¿Qué no?

LLF: Él está detrás de Agüero; él no puede ver la seña. Y me hace así [gesto de “no, no, no” con la mano]. Y yo digo: “Mira Agüero, yo no voy a ir. Si usted quiere hacer algo, lo hace aquí mismo. Pero yo no voy a ir”.

Regreso donde estoy tomando y le digo rápidamente a la gente qué me está pasando. Y ahí uno del grupo, ese que murió hace unos años ahora, que tenía su carro, trabajador de la base también, todos éramos, me dice: “Mira Lambert, lo mejor que tú haces vete para la base. Vamos, monta aquí y vámonos”. Después que salió él de ahí. Y llamaron a mi casa, le dijeron a mi mujer: “Oye, él se va para la base”. Eso era en el 58. Porque tuve como unos siete u ocho meses, después triunfó la Revolución.

JSG: ¿Se escondió en la base usted? ¿Para protegerse?

LLF: Sí, entonces pero cuando triunfa la Revolución, ¿qué yo traté de hacer? Tenía alguna gente que yo conocía que eran revolucionarios y tú sabes que empezó ya a coger todos los asesinos. Y yo no sé qué; Nelson ha asesinado gente. Entonces le digo al compañero: “Yo necesito salvar a Nelson”. Y me dice: “¿A quién? ¿Al asesino ése?” “¿Y Nelson es asesino?” “Sí”. No pude hacer nada. Nelson.

JSG: ¿Tú te acuerdas cuando se celebraba el juicio en el ayuntamiento? [. . .] Ahí fue donde Nelson también murió.

LLF: Sí. Bueno yo fui hasta el cementerio, a ver, cuando llegó el camión que tiraron los cuerpos abajo. Viene una señora que nunca conocí y mira para el cuerpo de Nelson. Esa señora va para allá y coge una piedra y digo: “¡Señora! No haga eso que ya está muerto”. “No, pero ese me asesinó a mí”. “¡Era un asesino! Él era chofer del jefe del Servicio de Inteligencia”, ella me dijo.

John Wayne Gallagher

JSG: En los años 50 cuando estaba la Revolución, ¿qué medida adoptaron los americanos en la base con respecto a la ideología política?

LLF: Bueno. Allí tú lo que no podías hacer era ninguna propaganda. Estaba prohibida la propaganda.

DEW: ¿Había una campaña anticomunista en la base, o aquí en Guantánamo?

LLF: Sí, sí. En la base. Si tú decías que simpatizabas, te botaban. Pero había muchos jóvenes y oficiales interesantes, entre ellos un jefe mío primero, se llama J.W. Gallagher, John Wayne Gallagher. Era un oficial que yo quisiera antes de morirme, verlo. A él o a un descendiente de él. Y todavía yo no sé nada de política. Gallagher me dice: "Lambert, el problema de América Latina, nosotros somos culpables del hambre y de todos los problemas que están pasando". Ese oficial me confesó eso.

Me dice: "Pero yo soy oficial americano y no puedo decir eso". Me aclaró y ahí es donde yo empiezo a pensar también.

JSG: ¿Qué grado tenía él? ¿Capitán o qué?

LLF: Él ahí era oficial.

DEW: Y gente como él vivía con su familia ahí en la base pero soldados no tenían a su familia.

LLF: Los soldados rasos tenían un albergue grande. Dos o tres albergues. Pero los que tenían a su familia eran oficiales.

[...]

Apoyo para los rebeldes

DEW: Y en camino al triunfo de la Revolución, ¿las cosas se pusieron más tensas o hablaron con más cuidado? ¿Recuerda usted algunos cambios en ese entonces?

LLF: Entonces ya cuando triunfa la Revolución, no. En el desarrollo de la Revolución, hay movimiento ya de rebelde que toman lugares alrededor de Guantánamo. Estuvo la toma de Caimanera y todas esas cosas. Pero ya yo estoy en la tensión con el Movimiento 26. No era miembro pero [colaboraba]. Una vez oímos una por radio que Fidel dijo que los rebeldes en el monte tenían que caminar y caminar mucho y se le echaba a perder las botas. Una locución de ellos.

Entonces yo soy el jefe de la tienda y estoy trabajando, cooperando con la gente del 26. ¿Qué es lo que yo hacía? Las tiendas, las mercancías cuando llegaban, tenían una fecha de vencimiento. Yo adelantaba la fecha de vencimiento en lo que es botas. Por ejemplo, si las botas me decían esta bota vence para tal mes de tal año, pero yo lo cambiaba para poder disponer. Esto es con relación a la gente del 26. Había unas pastillas que los americanos las usaban, era alimento. Es decir, una pastilla de esas duraba el día. Era como comer un almuerzo. Teníamos de eso. Teníamos, ¿qué cosa era más? Una cantidad de cosas. Y empezamos a separar.

Cuando ya tuvimos fósforos, cigarros, velas, todo eso... Avituallamiento le decíamos. Recuerdo que una vez los compañeros me dicen a mí: "Lambert, tienes que tú llevar todo eso para el campamento". El campamento estaba en . . . aquí detrás de Niceto Pérez. En ese campamento el jefe de ese campamento era . . . tiene un hermano que vive aquí atrás. Un hijo. Armando Castro. Nosotros llegamos al campamento con mi carro.

DEW: ¿Eso fue fácil?

LLF: Eso hay que esconderse.

DEW: Exacto, pero ¿uno se pone nervioso en una situación así, verdad?

LLF: Ah bueno pero . . . hay que hacerlo. Entonces, bueno, salí de la base con todo el avituallamiento, los compañeros me encargaron eso. Pero tampoco yo miraba peligro, no sé si me entiendes. Pasaba por todo esto y salía a la carretera de Santiago, a mediación de tú sabes donde ahí había una casita de visita, de este lado de la carretera. Del lado de allá era la entrada para ir para allá. Entonces, avisaron que hay cuando yo llego a la entrada, iba a haber un hombre, un rebelde, esperando.

Ese rebelde se llamaba Agustincito, le decían; que lo mataron. Porque después de eso él fue a coger un tanque de gasolina para llevárselo para el campamento, y había guardias adentro. Lo mataron. Agustincito.

Adentro del campamento

LLF: [. . .] Entonces yo llego al campamento y el primer soldado preso que llevaron para ahí, que lo cogieron aquí en la zona que era de tolerancia, era un oficial de esos batistianos. Pero eran oficiales. Estaban defendiendo a Batista pero esos grupos no se puede decir que eran asesinos. Se lo llevaron preso, lo cogieron preso aquí en la zona de [. . .] Cuando yo llego allí él tenía tres días preso, no comía ni bebía agua porque dicen que los rebeldes lo iban a matar. Yo pensé, entonces cuando yo voy para allá, bueno los rebeldes deben estar pasando trabajo para comer y todo. Yo llego y le entrego al jefe todas esas cosas, y le decía que éramos de los trabajadores de la base. Y ahí nos trataban bien. Casualmente un almuerzo muy bueno: carne, fricasé, toda esa cosa.

Pero en la cárcel que está hecha de bambú estaba el oficial ese. Llevaba tres días sin comer ni tomar agua, no quería nada. Entonces ahí uno de ellos me dice: “Lambert, ve a ver si tú [...] a ver si coge confianza y come, porque lleva tres días que no come. Dice que lo van a envenenar”. Yo fumaba. Yo llevé mis cigarros y entré. “Déjeme hablar con él”. Era un moreno él, muy bien parecido. Le digo: “Oye, esa historia que tú oyes que tú tienes miedo que te van a matar, eso no lo hacen los rebeldes. Los que hacen eso son ustedes mismos los batistianos. Matan a los revolucionarios. Pero a usted nadie lo va a matar”. Y empecé a conversar con él.

Llegó la hora del almuerzo y me sirven dos platos. Primero conversando con él, yo saco dos cigarros. Enciendo los dos y le doy uno, de los que cogió y fumó. Me traen la comida, en dos platos; el almuerzo. Cuando me lo traen yo como de la que le voy a dar a él. Como y digo “toma”. Ese hombre se la tragaba del hambre que tenía. Agua, dos copas. Yo tomaba y se la daba. Y ahí cogió confianza el hombre. Terminó siendo instructor de los revolucionarios y vino, cuando triunfa la Revolución, el vino hasta el Instituto de Guantánamo como rebelde.

DEW: ¿Entonces él llegó a apoyar la Revolución?

LLF: Sí, sí, sí. Él terminó con la Revolución. Él llegó al Instituto como instructor y siguió por ahí. La última vez que yo supe fue que él estuvo en La Habana.

Detención e interrogación

LLF: Y luego del triunfo de la revolución en la base, me interrogan a mí ocho personas. Entre esos está, uno que era cubano. Me preguntan sobre mi afiliación política. Ya habían botao [a] mucha gente. Todo el que ellos interrogaban, para fuera.

¿Pero qué pasa? Cuando fue la Revolución, yo pasé por la frontera con una revista que tiene la foto de Fidel en su portada. Yo, tan pronto entro, voy al comedor a desayunar al restaurante chiquito a desayunar y cojo *El Papous* para leer. Ese, un día que yo entré, yo noto que está llena la cafetería. Pero siempre hubo una silla abierta.

DEW: Hmm. ¿Una silla especial para usted?

LLF: Pues, en esa silla, había . . . un periódico. Yo voy para allá, me siento, cojo el periódico. Pero yo no sabía que me estaban chequeando. Me enteré después. Y entonces, bueno, cuando calle . . . yo cojo y voy a, saliendo a esa calle . . . El carro está afuera, pero también hay un fotógrafo. Está tomando fotos a distinta gente. Y cuando me toca a mí, yo hago esto [gesto como si sostuviera una foto para que alguien la viera]. Es la foto de Fidel de *Bohemia*.

JSG: Sí.

LLF: Ellos se echan a reír. Hasta cuando no me sepan, no pienso nada malo. Pero de ahí se corre mala mi situación. En la última, quince de febrero [del] 61, me detienen a las dos de la tarde. Y me tuvieron hasta las seis de la tarde, ocho hombres, interrogándome.

DEW: En inglés, me imagino.

LLF: Sí, lógico. Ahí fue donde yo me gané la batalla con eso. Entonces, cuando hay uno de ellos que dice: “Pero en vez de nosotros interrogarlo a él, ¿él nos interroga a nosotros?” [. . .] Me han hecho 20 preguntas. Me preguntaron por varios compañeros que eran del 26.

Entonces, como yo tenía que salir de la tienda para comprar mercancía. Cuando a mí me sueltan por la tarde me dicen: “Está bien, tú puedes continuar trabajando”.

Al otro día, no, me dice Lao: “Tienes que irte de la base, ya. Porque estás quemado”. Digo: “Lao, pero yo no me puedo ir ahora”. Eso fue, en la última quincena de febrero del 61. Digo: “Yo no me puedo ir de ahí ahora porque me preguntaron por un grupo de compañeros que yo sé quiénes son y tengo que alertarlos”. “Sí, pero ya tú tienes que terminar”, me dijo Lao. Entonces, yo cogí y regresé.

Y como yo tengo acceso, allá, al almacén principal, donde voy a coger las cosas que voy a trasladar para la tienda principal, eh... la sucursal, eso. La mayoría de esos trabajadores eran almacenistas ahí, el empaquetador y el marcador de mercancía, entre otros. Y yo, ya yo sabía que me están siguiendo.

Las autoridades ya estaban preparando para hacer algo. Y eso lo descubrí porque un día digo: “Voy a ver, como, quién me sigue”. Cuando salí de un lugar, viré rápidamente. Y los dos marinos que me seguían se echaron a reír, pero los descubrí.

Entonces, yo llegué ahí al almacén y digo yo: “[. . .] Oye, dígame de los últimos, los últimos pantalones, zapatos y camisas que han llegado” al jefe. Y me dice: “No, mira todo eso, no lo hemos trabajado”. Y yo, para alertar, ahí habían dos o tres trabajadores, eran del Movimiento 26. Y recuerdo ahora mismo a Tony Rodríguez. Digo: “Tony! Ve echando”. “Déjame este pantalón, ve echando; esta camisa, ve echando”. “Ve echando, ve echando”. “Tony, ve echando.” “Todos me miraron”.

DEW: “Ve echando” [se ríe].

LLF: Esas palabras se las decía así: “Ve echando”. Digo: “Dile a fulano, ya a fulano, y a fulano que vaya echando. Fulano, que vayas echando [. . .]” ¿Qué es lo que quiere decir, ve echando?

JSG: Que se vayan de la base [palmotea].

Salida de la base

LLF: Cuando yo salí, el 14 de marzo del 61, ya ellos estaban aquí afuera.

JSG: ¿Antes de Girón? Girón fue en abril.⁷

LLF: Sí. Ya éramos milicianos en el momento de mi salida en marzo. Éramos milicianos en la base.

JSG: ¿Ah, usted participó en la reunión de Fidel?

LLF: No participé porque ese día yo estaba trabajando. Pero el jefe mío, sí participó. McWilliam, murió hace tres meses.

Nadie se acuerda de él. Era el jefe del grupo de los trabajadores de la base, que Fidel lo cogió a la mano. Lo sacudió así. ¿Por qué? Porque él no entendía. Fidel vino, de forma secreta, para pedir que no fuéramos milicianos. Siguiéramos trabajando y trajéramos la divisa, pero que no fuéramos más milicianos.

Entonces, McWilliam se paraba frente a Fidel, Fidel lo coge por los dos brazos y dice: “Oye mi hijo”, le dice: “Mi hijo, recuerda, entiende lo que te estoy diciendo”, lo sacudió, “entienda lo que le estoy diciendo”. Entonces, bueno, de todas maneras, cuando Fidel ya termina, él se reúne con todos nosotros y nos explica, cómo se desarrolló eso. La mayoría decidieron [palmotea ligeramente] salir de la base. La mayoría salió, que eran milicianos.

Pero Fidel nos quería metidos en otro aparato militar, el aparato del enemigo.⁸

⁷ “Girón”, la invasión de bahía de Cochinos tomó lugar el 16 de abril del 1961. Un grupo de unos 1500 cubanos, exiliados entrenados y financiados por la CIA, lanzaron una invasión fallida de Cuba desde el mar por la bahía de Cochinos en un intento de derrocar a Fidel Castro y su revolución. Fidel y sus fuerzas revolucionarias derrotaron a los invasores. Algunos científicos políticos sostienen que el evento empujó a Cuba a las manos de la Unión Soviética.

⁸ En un segmento de la entrevista no incluido aquí, Lambert Farquard explica que trabajó en negocios e industria luego de ser empleado de la base. El gobierno de Fidel Castro le asignó a él y a otros exempleados de la base trabajos en esas áreas.

“I LIVE GUANTÁNAMO EVERY SINGLE DAY”: INTERVIEW WITH MANSOOR ADAYFI

Interview by Alexandra S. Moore
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Abstract

In this November 2018 interview, Mr. Mansoor Adayfi discusses his experiences at the prison at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where he was held for almost fifteen years without charges being pressed against him. He responds to questions about the impact of Guantánamo on his life, sharing details about his passion for writing, his current life in Serbia, and his future. In addition, Adayfi explains why he still feels like a detainee rather than a free man.

Keywords: Mansoor Adayfi, military prison at Guantánamo Bay, art and writing by Guantánamo prisoners, incarceration and the War on Terror, Guantánamo detainee resettlement

Resumen

En esta entrevista de noviembre del 2018, el señor Mansoor Adayfi discute sus experiencias como prisionero en la base naval estadounidense en la Bahía de Guantánamo, Cuba; donde fue detenido por casi quince años sin cargos presentados en su contra. Él responde a preguntas sobre el impacto de Guantánamo en su vida, al compartir detalles de su pasión por la escritura, su vida actual en Serbia y su futuro. Además, Adayfi explica por qué todavía se siente como un hombre detenido en vez de un ser humano totalmente libre.

Palabras clave: Mansoor Adayfi, la prisión militar de Guantánamo, arte y escritura por prisioneros de Guantánamo, encarcelamiento y la Guerra contra el terrorismo, reasentamiento de detenidos de Guantánamo

Mansoor Adayfi is a 36-year-old Yemeni citizen who was held in Guantánamo as detainee 441 for nearly fifteen years without charge. In 2016, the U.S. government released him to Serbia, where he had been told he would have permanent residency and support to complete his education. Upon arrival, however, those promises did not materialize. Meanwhile, when the Trump administration took office, it closed the detainee resettlement office in the U.S. Department of State. The office had been tasked with repatriating detainees and negotiating the conditions of their transfers and resettlement to their countries of origin or third-party states. Adayfi's safe residency in Serbia has been in jeopardy for months; however, the Department of State's Counterterrorism Bureau has only recently been assigned to resolve problems related to earlier resettlements.¹ He is in legal limbo and faces financial difficulty, and he has been refused any travel documents. His goals are to complete his education and to be able to support himself and help his family, who are suffering through war and famine in Yemen.

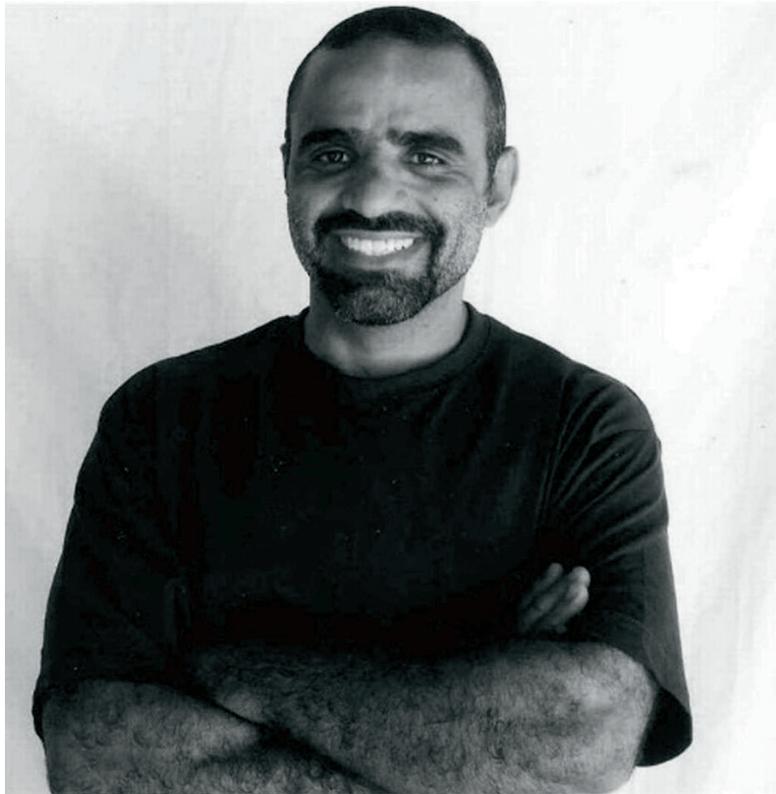
*Adayfi writes frequently about Guantánamo. His writings and commentary have been published by the New York Times, BBC Radio, and CBC Radio.² He also contributed the final chapter to *Witnessing Torture: Perspectives of Torture Survivors and Human Rights Workers* (2018), a collection of essays I co-edited with Elizabeth Swanson. In addition to these shorter pieces, he has completed one book manuscript titled *Art at Guantánamo*, and is currently revising *Moments of Guantánamo*, a book he drafted while still detained that focuses on the different dimensions of life there. This work, he emphasizes, is not a personal memoir of torture, abuse, and indefinite detention, but a collection of stories that range from horrifying to humorous about life inside the detention facility for detainees and their captors over a period of close to fifteen years.*

Adayfi and I spoke in November 2018 about the impact of Guantánamo on his life, his writing, and his future.

¹ Carol Rosenberg, "Trump closed an office that tracked ex-Gitmo inmates. Now we don't know where some went," *McClatchyDC*, Nov. 13, 2018 (<https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/national-security/guantanamo/article220993900.html>).

² Mansoor Adayfi's print and radio publications include: "The Art of Now: Guantánamo," *BBC Radio*, March 29, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09wvvgg4>; "Did We Survive Torture?" *Witnessing Torture: Perspectives of Torture Survivors and Human Rights Workers*, edited by Alexandra S. Moore and Elizabeth Swanson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 231-236; "In Our Prison by the Sea," *The New York Times*, Sept. 15, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/15/opinion/sunday/guantanamo-early-years-sea.html>; "Love Me: How one man learned about love and marriage in Guantánamo," *CBC Radio*, Aug. 20, 2018; and "Taking Marriage Class at Guantánamo," *The New York Times*, July 27, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/27/style/modern-love-marriage-class-at-guantanamo.html>.

“I LIVE GUANTÁNAMO EVERY SINGLE DAY”



Mansoor Adayfi

[When we connected, Adayfi had just heard the ceiling fixture in the next room crash to the floor.]

Mansoor Adayfi: *I know they have wiretapping here. I don't care.*

Alexandra S. Moore: Thanks so much for taking time to talk. How are you doing?

MA: *My situation is uncertain, in limbo. It's just crazy. I don't want to think about it. I would like to be somewhere where people treat me as a human being. I know people have concerns, but give a chance to prove myself. Give me a chance to show who I am.*

ASM: What did you know about the United States before you went to Guantánamo?

MA: *I didn't know much about the U.S. I wasn't too interested in the world outside my life in Yemen. I was focusing on my job and planning to go to one of the Gulf countries to work and to build my life.*

What we [had] heard about America is that we might have the chance of a better life, a better job, a better education. It was funny, in the camp they refused to give me a U.S. history book.

ASM: You were taken to Guantánamo when you were young, only nineteen years old. What was it like to be there at that age in particular?

MA: *Even before Guantánamo, when we were in CIA black sites, they tried to crush us. We were young, and some of us dreamed to go to the United States. When we ended up in CIA hands, we couldn't believe what was happening to us.*

It was hard on us. It was tough and hard and difficult. It was miserable and sad. We flew for maybe forty-eight hours. I remember we landed three times and changed planes. People said [later] we went from Afghanistan to Turkey, from Turkey to another country, and then to Poland. I remember I couldn't sleep because the guards were beating, slapping us all the way, and there was loud music and [noise from] the engine of the airplanes. I had been beaten so badly, then strapped down onto the plane. We were blindfolded, and they put bags on our heads.

When we landed at Guantánamo, first they took us on the ferry, and we felt the sea beneath us. Then they took us to Camp X-Ray. We tried to figure out where we were in order to face toward Mecca to pray. We tried to see the stars, but we couldn't see the sky because there was too much light. We couldn't determine where we were. Some people said Oman, some said India. [Laughter] The pipes said Made in India. But then we saw signs that said Made in China.

We had no idea. Sometimes we thought we'd be thrown in the ocean, sometimes they said we'd be killed. Imagine you end up in a place...you know no one there, and no one can tell you anything.

ASM: Did you know it was a military installation?

MA: *No. We saw some birds and the iguanas. But we didn't know what they were.*

When we were shipped to Guantánamo, we spent about three months in Camp X-Ray, but we knew nothing about where we were. When we moved to Camp Delta, another group [of detainees] came from Pakistan. My friend [in that group]

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said, this is Guantánamo. It is in Cuba in the Caribbean. I said, okay, but I had never heard about the Caribbean. I didn't know what that is.

You know what they say, if you behave normally under abnormal circumstances, then you are not normal. We were reacting to whatever they threw at us. You know who fought the most, who drove the guards at the camp crazy [by] fighting, yelling, and refusing to talk to the interrogators? It was the youngest detainees, those between sixteen and twenty-three years old. We were the youngest, and we were the ones who were crushed.

Once a special committee [sent by the Obama administration] came to the camp to try to make improvements during the time we were on hunger strike. We were not allowed to strike, and the camp administration put us in the orange suits to punish us. I met two of the visitors. They said, “Why are you in the orange suit?” I said, “You came all the way here to ask me why I'm in an orange suit?” They said, “You are a bad guy. You are causing problems.” I said, “Of course, I'm causing problems because I want to leave!”

They insulted everything that makes me a human being: my dignity, my religion, who I am. They treated us like animals. They thought I would talk to them? No, I am a tribal man. We live with our honor, dignity, and pride. We took [the way we were treated] as a challenge from the very first moment.

ASM: Can you explain further what it means to be a tribal man?

MA: *Yemen is a tribal society. A tribal society is composed of groups of families. In our tribe, people are raised on honor, courage, respect, dignity, transparency. People stick to their words, their beliefs, and their values. A single action against them can shame not just your family, but your whole tribe. Your parents teach you how to talk, how to behave—to be honest, to be generous: how to be a man.*

When we went to Guantánamo, they crushed all of that. My parents brought me up to stand for what's right and to sacrifice for others. So, in Guantánamo, I was fighting for everyone. In our way of life, we are not afraid of punishment. We are just afraid of failing our values, our families, our tribe, ourselves.

I was on hunger strike for two years. I was force fed. I said, “I'll sign any paper for you. Just treat me like a human being.”

ASM: What can you tell us about the way you were treated?

MA: *In 2002, the situation was very bad, but the interrogation was normal: they would take you and ask you questions; you would get beaten by the guards*

when they [brought] you to interrogation. Then at the end of 2002, everything changed. Upside down. Special blocks, special camps. Torture. Sleep deprivation. The problem with the interrogators was that they didn't want to figure out who we are. They just tried to prove that we were who our files said we were.

ASM: Why do you think it changed at the end of 2002?

MA: Because they didn't get what they were looking for, but they didn't know what they were looking for. They thought all detainees were lying, and they tried to make us confess that we were terrorists. It was a big mess. They were collecting people from all over the world, and it was up to the interrogators to sort this mess.

They tried to recruit me. You drug me, you beat me, you torture me, and you expect me to talk to you? I will not.

ASM: Did the staff change at that time, or just the methods?

MA: Everything changed. Some of the [earlier] staff was still there, but they brought new staff, new guards, new interrogators. The rules changed almost daily. This was one of the biggest problems.

It wasn't a normal prison. It was a field experiment, and we were the subjects. No one was watching, and they could do anything to us. They took us [detainees] from different countries, different languages, different ages, and they wanted to find out what makes us happy, what makes us sad, what makes us cry. They wanted to know what we think and how we communicate. They were recording everything and studying us. They wanted to find out how to fight the new enemy they had.

ASM: Who was doing the experiments?

MA: They were conducted by the psychologists.

I was in solitary confinement for eight years—they'd give me five days out, then back, one week out, then back. I was in my cell, and there was vacuum machine by my door that [ran] 24 hours a day. It never stopped. They didn't want us to talk to each other, and you couldn't hear anything. You felt pain in your head, in your eyes. I couldn't think. I was screaming. The light was sometimes very bright, sometimes dark. Sometimes the cell was very cold, sometimes hot.

I was having problems with the guards. They pushed me into the door, and I resisted. I refused to talk to the interrogator, so they sent the psychologist. I talked

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to the iguana [who used to visit me in the exercise yard], but I didn't want to talk to the psychologist.

Then they sent me to Delta Block. Oh, god. The worst place in Guantánamo was Delta Block.

ASM: What can you say about Delta Block?

MA: *It was the black hole of Guantánamo. It was a normal block, and then they turned it into the psychologists' unit. There was torture in it, supervised by psychologists. I was taken there as a punishment for refusing to talk to interrogators.*

Delta Block was where the psychologists functioned. They brought the IRF [Internal Reaction Force] team and took me there. As soon as I arrived, they took me to a room. They cut my clothes off and tied me—all four points (hands, legs)—on my stomach on the bed. I thought they were going to rape me. The psychologist came in and asked me if I wanted to talk. I said, no. She said, if you want to talk, call your interrogator. They left me for 24 hours. No food, no drink. If you have to pee, go on the bed. Then they took me to an empty cell. I had only a pair of shorts. The ground of the cell was very cold steel. I could just squat and hold my knees. Then I felt the water coming under the door. It was freezing. Every ten or fifteen minutes, they would knock on the door to keep me awake. For meals they would give me a cup of water, bread with peanut butter, a piece of potato. I spent 25 days in this place.

We were stupid, do you know why?

ASM: Why?

MA: *They wanted us to resist so that they could experiment on us.*

The worst thing in Delta Block was that they gave me injections. All of us detainees were afraid of the shots. They gave them to me a couple of times. I was resisting. I was screaming, kicking, hitting. I was crazy because you bring a guy from a tribal society. He can't speak the language. You start touching his penis and searching his ass. Of course, I was going to fight. I had no other choice.

They gave me the shot, and do you know what I felt? I was paralyzed. I couldn't move anything. I could hear people talk and could move my eyes. That's it. I wanted to move, I wanted to talk, but I couldn't.

Then, in 2005, they built the Behavioral Health Unit, which was the same thing. They can do whatever they want with no justification whatsoever. If you

end up in the hands of the psychologists, god have mercy on you.

ASM: Do you remember how you thought of yourself as a young man at Guantánamo?

MA: They would tell me I'm a bad guy. I'm not bad, but at Guantánamo they were extracting the worst from all of us. I come from a very good family, a respected family. I have never hurt anyone in my life. Before I went to Guantánamo, I never cursed anyone. Even in the first year, I would never even curse the guards. By 2009, I was cursing in fifteen different languages.

The problem was you were dealing with someone who knew everything about you, who could do anything to you. We were just reacting. We were caught in the circle of reacting and the circle of punishment.

This has been the hardest story to write [in my manuscript, Moments of Guantánamo] because when you stay in this situation you transform into a different kind of person. They keep beating you, and you react, react, react. And then they punish you. You get beaten every time. They spray you, they punish you, and then you start not to care anymore.

You forget yourself. You forget who you are, and you are transformed into a beast. Then, in 2009, I found I had become a different person, a crazy guy. I said to myself, this is not who I am.

ASM: What changed for you in 2010?

MA: We [had been] fighting for our brothers and for the situation to be changed. We spent all our time in solitary confinement. There were cell searches, they were disgracing our religion, they were beating us, and we wanted to stop the torture, stop the interrogation. Stop, stop, stop.

When I moved to communal living in 2010, I found myself to be a different person, and not who I really am. I was not the way I had been raised by my father and mother. I said, I don't want to continue my life like this.

Then it was like peacetime. You didn't have to interact with the guards. You could stay in your cell. I started to focus on myself. When I moved to the communal setting, I thought, okay, I need to change now.

I started with education. I said, I need to finish college. They said, no.

When we asked them about art class, they said, you are terrorists. How can a terrorist be an artist? We asked some of our brothers to paint some pictures and

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we sent them to the administration, to the psychologists, to the general. They were surprised. They said, who did these? We said, our brothers.

ASM: A lot of the guards were the same age as many of you.

MA: At the beginning, they were thirty, thirty-five, forty years old. Some were more understanding. Then they brought guards who were twenty, twenty-one, sometimes nineteen. It was crazy. When I was older, in 2010, 2012, I felt pity and mercy toward those guards because someone was controlling them, and they didn't know what to think. They think they are serving the country, but they are not.

There were some guards who would kill us if they could. It's true. And then there were some guards who were very nice, who tried to help. Some of them apologized to us about what was going on there.

ASM: What were the classes like at Guantánamo when you finally got them?

MA: The classes at Guantánamo weren't great classes. At the beginning, they were just for propaganda purposes.

ASM: How did you learn English?

MA: I learned basic English in secondary school. It was not great. At first when I got to Guantánamo, I was in solitary confinement. But in late 2010, when I [was transferred] to communal living, I started learning English again. I started with guards. I was talking with them and reading the newspaper. And then... it's a funny story. I started with the book, Around the World in 80 Days. It was my first book in English. It took me around six months to finish it. Guards and detainees used to laugh at me and say, "Mansoor, that guy took eighty days to travel around the world! How come it's taking you six months to read [about] it?" It was really hard to find someone to help. I would read, go to the dictionary to check some words, and then come back and read with some of the guards.

Mostly I would just talk with the guards. I was the most social detainee with them. The camp administration used to tell the guards, "Don't talk to 441. Stay away from 441. He's collecting information. He's spying on us." I wasn't spying. I was talking with them to have a conversation. We also studied English grammar and how to write in cursive.

ASM: Did you read other books in the library there?

MA: Yes, yes, I read other books (not many, but a few) and newspapers and magazines. I read *The Hunger Games*. And I got a dictionary and some books about learning English from one of my lawyers. Learning English was a long journey, but I managed.

ASM: I know you're interested in studying IT management, but you're also writing. Did Guantánamo make you a writer or were you a writer before?

MA: I had a talent before, but I never developed my talent. Nobody told me that I can write. But as a kid I used to write very good [essays].

In Guantánamo, I used to write for my brothers, I used to write to the camp commanders about our situation, I used to write to the families of my brothers. I wrote to the politicians. I wrote a business plan and two book drafts in English.

Now I'm working on Moments of Guantánamo. I wrote it first in the camp.

I wrote as a reader, not as writer. I wanted to write something unique, something not just about me, but about everyone. I want the reader to live Guantánamo, to understand life there: how detainees live with each other, how detainees and guards live with each other, how the detainees live with the camp administration. I will let the reader live the life there with detainees, with guards, with animals, with torture, with everything. I won't tell you if it's good or bad, but I will include, good, bad, happy, sad, crazy, romance, sex, everything! When the reader is done, he will have his own picture of Guantánamo.

Guantánamo was not just orange jumpsuits or torture or chains. That was there, but there was life itself. There were human beings. I want readers to be my guests there. We can move from year to year, from camp to camp to see life itself there.

ASM: It's hard for me to imagine you ever not writing.

MA: I like to write. I can spend hours and hours just writing. I do not feel tired. Sometimes I forget to eat. I don't exercise.

ASM: Why do you like writing in English now?

MA: It's hard to find the words to explain. The book, *Moments of Guantánamo*, I first wrote in English, so I'm revising it in English now. Writing in English is not easy for me because I don't have the capacity or storage of vocabulary when I

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want to describe the scenery or something like that. Arabic would be easier for me. But I would like to publish the book in English, and I appreciate English language readers. I like their reactions, and people are interested in the stories.

ASM: Maybe when you finish your book you won't want to write about Guantánamo anymore.

MA: *Hmmm, I don't know. Nobody wants to go back [to their Guantánamo memories]. It is dangerous to go back. I am still there because I haven't found a life that will take me from there. Do you understand? Some of those other detainees have their lives. They have gotten married, they have started jobs, they have kids, they just want to forget about it. Here I haven't found a community that I can talk to. I'm trying to find people here, to make friends, but it is very hard. Other [former] detainees ask me, "Are you still in Guantánamo?" I say, "Yes." I feel like I'm treated like a detainee, not like a free man.*

ASM: Do you think Guantánamo is ever going to close?

MA: *Yes, it is going to close! It wastes a lot of money, and at the same time it is pointless.*

Imagine: the ratio for detainees to guards is about 1:45.³ The contractors are the ones running that camp. The only reason the camp is open is because of all the money [contractors make from it]. It is not for security, not for American interests. No! The only loser in keeping Guantánamo is America itself. It's not terrorism, not al Qaeda, not anyone else.

Guantánamo is a black spot on U.S. history. It was propaganda more than security or safety. [The U.S. government] wanted to tell people they captured all the bad people. The cages, orange jump suits.... They deployed thousands and thousands of soldiers and spent hundreds of millions of dollars, and what did they accomplish?

Also, it is unfair. Nobody asked our opinion about 9/11. 9/11 was a hideous crime. But people look at us through 9/11; and, at the same time, we look at

³ Current statistics on the population of the naval base include forty detainees and approximately 1,800 prison zone staff at a cost of an estimated \$11 million per year per detainee. (“Guantánamo by the Numbers,” *Human Rights First* (Oct. 10, 2018), <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/guantanamo-numbers> and “Guantánamo by the Numbers,” *Miami Herald* (Oct. 28, 2018), <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/guantanamo/article2163210.html>).

America through Guantánamo. They look at all Muslims as terrorists. When we were at Guantánamo, we thought all Americans were bad because of the way we were treated. We judge each other without asking, are they really who we think they are? On both sides, they are not. This is a very big problem.

ASM: Can you think about ever putting Guantánamo behind you, or is that ridiculous?

MA: I don't think so. I haven't left Guantánamo. I live Guantánamo every single day. When I write, I am talking about Guantánamo. I'm writing, I'm correcting, I'm collecting stories. It's a lot of effort.

Maybe you can understand. There are disabled people who can't walk or can't talk. For detainees, we have the same thing, but in our own way. We lost 15 years of our lives. This is a disability.

Some detainees move on with their lives, some detainees still suffer. They are all still victims. Some can't find a job because of Guantánamo stigma. I say to them, it's something you have to live with. Consider it as a part of you, like your hand, your head, your leg.

Of course, it affects our lives. It is a scar in our lives that will never heal. Some detainees manage to move on because they found a life that actually took them away from that place. But in my case, I can't settle down. At Guantánamo, I was fighting for my freedom, but here I'm fighting for my life. I have no rights, and anything can happen. Just like in Guantánamo. Anything can happen at any moment.

ESSAYS

ART, ECOLOGY, AND REPAIR: IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF THE GUANTÁNAMO NAVAL BASE

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Abstract

In the context of projections towards the future within political speech—specifically, the War on Terror and Cuba’s language of war against imperialism—this essay addresses visions of the future that have taken shape in different spheres of public life. It argues that the futures for Guantánamo articulated in both creative and environmental work—the first exemplified by the virtual Guantanamo (sic.) Bay Museum of Art and History project, and the second by a proposal that the post-prison base become a site for collaborative ecological research, drafted by a conservation biologist and a scholar of international law—highlight possibilities for symbolic reparation and post-conflict restoration akin to efforts to preserve “sites of conscience” elsewhere in the world.

Keywords: Guantánamo art, symbolic reparation, sites of conscience, ecology and repair, War on Terror, Cuba and imperialism

Resumen

En el contexto de las proyecciones hacia el futuro que se encuentran en el discurso político, específicamente en la “Guerra contra el Terror” y el lenguaje de una “guerra contra el imperialismo” en Cuba, este ensayo aborda visiones del futuro que se presentan en diferentes esferas de la vida pública. Plantea que los futuros posibles para Guantánamo que se han delineado tanto en el trabajo creativo como en el ambiental—el primero ejemplificado por el proyecto virtual “Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History” y el segundo por una propuesta desde los campos de la biología de la conservación y el derecho internacional, que haría de la base un sitio para la investigación ecológica colaborativa—destacan ciertas posibilidades de reparación simbólica y restauración pos-conflicto, parecidas a los esfuerzos para preservar los “sitios de conciencia” en otras partes del mundo.

Palabras clave: arte de Guantánamo, reparaciones simbólicas, sitios de conciencia, ecología, la “Guerra contra el Terror,” Cuba e imperialismo

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Speculations about what will happen at Guantánamo unfold against the idiosyncratic orientations toward the future of two rhetorical wars, neither of which has yet subsided. The first is the U.S.-driven “War on Terror,” with its semantic preclusion of an ending and lexicon of “indefinite detentions,” into which President Donald J. Trump’s reported enthusiasm for loading the prison up with “bad dudes” has breathed new life, despite the war itself having taken on new guises.¹ The second is the Cuban Revolution’s language of “war on imperialism,” waged in the future tense. Initiated in Fidel Castro’s 1953 speech “History Will Absolve Me” and perpetuated, if diluted, by his successors Raúl Castro and Miguel Díaz Canel, this war rhetoric was propelled by a verb in the future tense: *venceremos* (“we will overcome”), a rallying cry to which Caimanera, the Cuban town that borders the naval base and is heralded as the first line of defense against imperialism, lays particular claim. Indeed, although the Guantánamo Naval Base is closed off from Cuba both politically and physically—to the extent that Peter Hulme has called the former “the most perfect colonial enclave that ever existed” (377)—the overlapping temporalities that contribute to imagined futures for the base parallel the future as envisaged by artists and historians in contemporary Cuba. The 1950s time of “Mayberry”-inflected civilian life on the base and pre-Revolution cars in Havana, for example, suggests symmetry—as does the suspension of time’s normal progression that on one side of the base’s fence-line renders “indefinite” detentions as legal and physical stasis and, on the other, traps revolutionary narrative, despite its insistent drive to the future, in what Antonio José Ponte has called “its own immurement” (15).

In the context of such projections towards the future within political speech, this essay addresses visions of the future that have taken shape in dif-

¹ The status of the “War on Terror” that President George W. Bush declared in 2001 is currently under discussion. Some commentators, such as Nicholas Schmidle, writing in January 2018, consider the prioritizing of Russia and China as potential foes as a move away from counterterrorism efforts toward what a senior Defense Department official called “the clarity of big wars.” Others, like Katherine Zimmerman in a May 2018 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, refer to a “never-ending war on terror;” or, like former National Security Council employees Daniel J. Rosenthal and Loren Dejonge Schulman writing in *The Atlantic* in August 2018, consider the deregulation of, and lack of publicly available information on, drone use to constitute “a secret war on terror,” part of a “broader trend away from transparency about military activities” (5).

ferent spheres of public life, one creative and the other environmental. Art, like literature, is at liberty to imagine the impossible and present it as the real, whereas less creative forms of expression have been more constrained. The humanities more broadly, as Don Walicek and Jessica Adams have signaled specifically in relation to responses to Guantánamo, are similarly unrestricted in their reach: they can “forge profound and lasting connections among wildly divergent groups and individuals” (25), and herein lies their “unsettling power” (25). And yet, as Doris Sommer has argued forcefully in *The Work of Art in the World*, creative artists may also lead the way for other social actors to bring into being the seemingly unthinkable, and thus precipitate large-scale change.² This essay argues that invocations of a peaceful future in works of art are crucial to a recalibration of the relationship between war and community—a recalibration that has produced a powerful undercurrent of compassion both among individuals at the base, and between them and Cubans residing across the border. Although artists’ engagement with, and opposition to, detentions at Guantánamo has rarely taken into account scientists’ ongoing efforts to preserve the area’s marine and terrestrial ecosystems, both share an investment in the future that presupposes a respect for life. At Guantánamo Bay, creative work finds an analogue and potential ally in environmental conservation, the first exemplified by the virtual Guantánamo Bay Museum of Art and History project, and the second by a proposal that the post-prison base become a site for collaborative ecological research, drafted by a conservation biologist and a scholar of international law.³ Different though their disciplinary impetus may be, these works can be read together productively as they highlight possibilities for symbolic reparation and post-conflict restoration akin to efforts to preserve “sites of conscience” elsewhere in the world. While reparation, however, tends to take place in the aftermath of violence, in times of transitional justice, the indefinite time-frame of the Guantánamo naval base’s current use brings a necessarily speculative dimension to visions of repair.

² “Artists,” writes Sommer, “think critically to interpret existing material into new forms. How else can one imagine and then realize a project—including social, political, or economic development?” (10).

³ The Guantánamo Bay Museum of Art and History generally deploys an anglicized spelling, “Guantanamo,” with some exceptions in contributions to its “Center of Critical Studies” section. This essay reproduces the anglicization only in direct citations; otherwise, it preserves the Spanish spelling, “Guantánamo.”

Art produced at, near and in relation to the naval base often looks outward from the base as a way of looking forward; a way of extending space that is also a way of projecting toward the future in time. The paintings, drawings, and sculptures of the eight former and current detainees included in the exhibit “Ode to the Sea: Art from Guantánamo Bay,” on view at the President’s Gallery of John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York from October 2017 to January 2018, show the sea as a strikingly frequent image. Although in some artworks, seascapes do not resemble the barren shores and boat-less waters of the Caribbean around Guantánamo as they are today, others show palm trees like those of Eastern Cuba; and, as former detainee Mansoor Adayfi writes in his prologue to the exhibit, the sea was a vital source of hope for him and his fellow detainees. Adayfi recalls that the Afghans at Guantánamo had never seen the sea, had no conception of what it was, and were afraid of it. “To remind themselves that a world beyond the hell of Guantánamo still existed,” he writes, “we wanted to show the Afghans the sea” (3). To look at the sea “felt a little like freedom” (4); to draw it, and to populate it with fishermen, sunbathers, piers, and ocean liners, as the detainee artists do, is to imagine oneself away from the cellblocks, elsewhere, in a past and/or future world of less suffering.⁴ Similarly, photographic work by artists Edmund Clark (*Guantánamo: If the Light Goes Out*, 2011) and Debi Cornwall (*Welcome to Camp America*, 2017) examines the post-Guantánamo future of certain individuals by portraying the spaces they occupy, including images of the cells and interrogation rooms that the detainees once inhabited alongside others of the “homes” they create or re-create after their release. Clark photographs houses in the UK and the Middle East to which British Muslim detainees returned, while Cornwall raises troubling questions about reparation, alienation, discrimination, and the quality of a future in the aftermath of Guantánamo. *Welcome to Camp America* includes, as loose leaves of paper, twelve photographs of men in the third countries to which they were released in the absence of a politically viable home country to receive them. Alexander Beatón and Pedro Gutiérrez, Cuban artists working from the city of Guantánamo, project their multimedia installation *El camino de la estragia* toward a future of *convivencia*, or “living together,” even as their work—watchtowers swathed by the fishing nets that represent the base’s negative effects on the livelihood of local fisherman, traditional rocking chairs nailed

⁴ For Adayfi’s comments on his experiences and his writings, see Alexandra S. Moore’s interview with him that is included in this volume of *Sargasso*.

to walls, immobilized—explores a past history of the base’s relationship to its Cuban locale.⁵

Each of the above-mentioned artists looks to a future different from, but nevertheless continuous with, the present. In contrast, the Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History, an online project curated by the American artist Ian Alan Paul, takes advantage of art’s capacity to revise the real to assume a radically different relationship between past, present, and future. Paul’s personal website describes the project’s medium as “Speculation. Website, Installation, Performance”; its coming to fruition as “the result of a large collaboration with over 25 artists, writers and other volunteers from Europe as well as North and South America”; and its operation as “a critical fiction and experimental documentary, asserting that the Guantanamo Bay detention facilities have been closed and replaced by a museum that critically reflects on the social and political significance of the prison.”

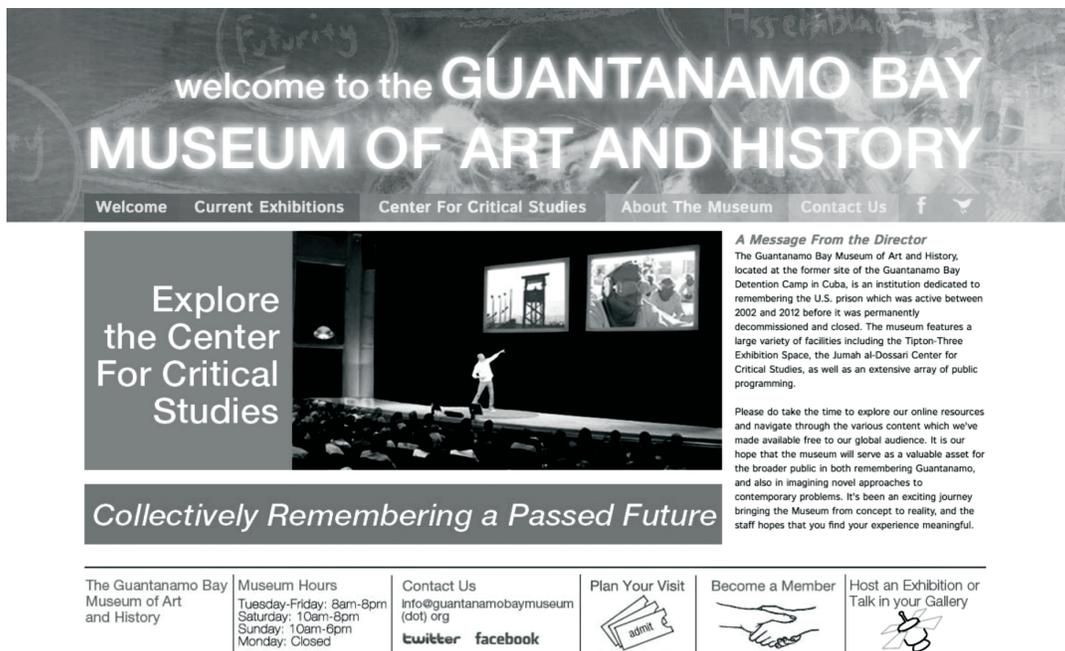


Fig. 1: Welcome page, Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History

⁵ I discuss the work of Beatón and Gutiérrez at greater length in “Guantánamo and Community: Visual Approaches to the Naval Base,” in eds. Walicek and Adams, *Guantánamo and American Empire: The Humanities Respond*.

The project masquerades as the online portal of a museum physically located at Guantánamo Bay, although there are frequent tell-tale signs that something is amiss. A visitor can, for example, click on a “Plan Your Visit” button and reach a page that both states that “galleries and archives are open during regular hours Tuesday–Sunday, but the museum is closed on Mondays,” and gestures at the difficulty of reaching the museum given that it is “located at the site of the former site of the Guantánamo Bay Detention Facility in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.” Nevertheless, its administrators, in an effort to “assist our visitors as much as possible,” claim to have organized flights to a local airport “from several major airports around the world” as well as offering “a limited boating service from several ports in the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala for those visitors who wish to experience an ocean voyage as part of their visit.” These advertised itineraries are far less complicated than would be possible given current restrictions on access to U.S. bases and travel to Cuba. They are a clue, as one contemplates entering the museum, that it is not what it seems; and, more importantly, that our own present does not have to be as it is.

The museum, as per its “Director’s Message,” is “located at the former site of the Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp in Cuba,” and is dedicated to “remembering the U.S. prison which was active between 2002 and 2012 before it was permanently decommissioned and closed.” The mission cited on its “Welcome” page is “Collectively Remembering a Passed Future”; remembering, that is, a time ambiguously located between past and future, but whose present emerges as one in which the naval base’s detention centers have been closed and its facilities repurposed to house exhibitions and scholarship on human rights abuses committed there. This “Passed Future,” like the “History” in the museum’s name, suggests both the historical period—the past—during which such abuses were committed, and the intrinsic endlessness accorded Guantánamo by both the lease on the naval base and the legal lexicon of the “War on Terror.” As Amy Kaplan has argued, there is a direct relationship between the imperialist coopting of the base “as a territory held by the United States in perpetuity, over which sovereignty is indefinitely deferred” and its use for “the indefinite detention of unnamed enemies in ... a perpetual war on Terror” (837). Manipulating what Kaplan has called “the temporal dimensions of Guantánamo’s location” (827), the museum replaces what was once the future with a harmonious (if hypothetical) present, and places the current situation in the past tense. It promotes compassionate



Planning a Visit to the Museum

The *Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History* is pleased to be able to help you plan your visit to the museum. Thanks to the generous donations of several foundations and anonymous individuals, admittance to the museum is free to the global public. The galleries and archives are open during regular hours Tuesday-Sunday, but the museum is closed on Mondays. We are happy to arrange tours for visiting groups or classes with our team of docents, and we also are available to help you arrange any special events which you would like to organize on the museum grounds.



Travel Considerations

Because our museum is located at the former site of the Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, making travel arrangements to visit the museum can be difficult. In order to assist our visitors as much as possible, we have organized several regular flights to the local airport near the facility from several major airports around the world. We also offer a limited boating service from several ports in the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala for those visitors who wish to experience an ocean voyage as part of their visit.

Ecological Tours

In addition to offering accommodations for travelling to the museum and giving guided tours of our various exhibitions and facilities, we are also proud to offer an in-depth ecological tour of Guantanamo Bay. Offered monthly, the Guantanamo Bay ecological tour is 3 days long and includes a variety of activities which all engage with the broader ecological and geological history of the area. The tour begins with a group hike through ecological reserves where tourists will get to observe local wildlife, and at the end of the first day participants set up camp on one of Guantanamo's hidden beaches.

On the second day, tourists are taken out of the waters of the bay to survey the various coasts with a team of local biologists as well as assist in taking water samples. Unfortunately, much like many other military facilities, the former Guantanamo Bay military base released large amounts of pollutants and toxins into the surrounding environment while it was still in operation. In assisting the efforts of local biologists and environmental toxicologists, we hope to help reverse much of the damage done to the bay. On the last day, participants hike back in from the coast with their guide and arrive at the *Guantanamo Bay Museum Meeting Facilities* in order to reflect upon and discuss their experiences.

We are committed to assisting you plan your trip to the museum and sincerely hope that you'll be able to join us soon. We believe that the act of networking and collaborating with large arrays of individuals is foundational to the work that we do at the Museum. If you are interested in planning a tour for your school or organization, please do not hesitate to [click here](#) to contact us for more information.

<p>The Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History</p>	<p>Museum Hours Tuesday-Friday: 8am-8pm Saturday: 10am-8pm Sunday: 10am-6pm Monday: Closed</p>	<p>Contact Us info@guantanamo baymuseum (dot) org  </p>	<p>Plan Your Visit </p>	<p>Become a Member </p>	<p>Host an Exhibition or Talk in your Gallery </p>
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Fig. 2 : “Planning a Visit to the Museum” page, Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History

commemoration of a historical moment that is effectively our own; and, in occupying a future that is considerably better than the present, it advocates action that will achieve that imagined state.

The Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History posits a grammatical future perfect, a “this atrocity will have been eradicated,” a “these prisons will have been closed.” It is, nevertheless, when this tense breaks down and the museum’s exhibits inhabit a more familiar present that its activist program becomes more visible, and its display of what has been achieved fuses with

an agenda of what must be done now. The articles linked from the museum's Jumah al-Dossari Center for Critical Studies are introduced, as is the project in its entirety, as though the detention centers had been closed; they are part of the larger mission to "memorialize the events that transpired at the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp while it was in operation while also serving as a discursive platform for preventing the reemergence of similarly abusive institutions." The articles themselves, though, are written from a time when the detention camps are still in operation. Harsha Walia's piece, titled "Omar Khadr: Race, Empire and Unexceptional Detention," addresses the case of Khadr—a Canadian citizen held at Guantánamo from the age of fifteen—and states that "at the time of writing, Khadr was still being held at Guantanamo Bay." (In a more recent present, albeit not that of museum, Khadr has been released, and the formal apology and ten-million-dollar compensation extended to him by the Canadian government have caused public outcry at the same time as they offer some small hope of reparation for other former detainees.) Derek Gregory's article, "The Black Flag: Guantanamo Bay and the State of Exception," similarly marks its present as anticipating, but not witnessing, change: "To date, 267 prisoners have been released from Guantánamo and eighty more have been transferred to their own countries for continued detention" (the total of these numbers has since risen to over 700). The remaining two essays in the Center for Critical Studies—Judith Butler's "Precarious Life; Indefinite Detention" and Martin Puchner's "Guantanamo Bay: A State of Exception"—also write from a time in which the detention centers continue to operate. Critical discourse, the project implies, cannot afford to inhabit the virtual, future present as easily as art can; and yet the discrepant temporalities of the two are crucially interdependent in effecting the change that is, after all, the political agenda of the Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History. In reporting that "it took more than 3 years for a concert of international human rights campaigns, groups of artists and curators organized in opposition to the prison, and coalitional social movements to finally manifest the political strength to shutter all of the facilities and halt their operations," the timeline narrated in the "About the Museum" section credits artists and political actors—and, more importantly, artists as political actors, and vice versa—with an ability to overturn political decisions that has not yet manifested itself fully in the present day. Rather, it demands of today's viewers and visitors a facility to move conceptually between different versions of the present.

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Presenting the *Jumah al-Dossari* Center For Critical Studies

The *Jumah al-Dossari Center for Critical Studies* was founded as an integral part of the museum in the hopes of creating a generative environment for critical discourses on human rights, imprisonment, torture, and postnational political formations. Visitors to the museum are invited to read our publications, browse our library of critical texts, as well as attend one of our many public lecture series. We at the *Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History* feel that it is incredibly important to both memorialize the events that transpired at the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp while it was in operation while also serving as a discursive platform for preventing the reemergence of similarly abusive institutions.

We publish a select number of articles from our collection for free online to ensure that the broader public has access to our materials. Please do explore and read our current selection of texts by clicking on any of the sections below:



Omar Khadr: Race, Empire, and Unexceptional Detention
by Harsha Walia

Through examining the case of Omar Khadr, the youngest prisoner the have been detained at Guantanamo, Harsha Walia looks to how the excesses of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp are representative of broader systems of colonialism, criminality and imprisonment.



Precarious Life; Indefinite Detention
by Judith Butler

In this essay, Judith Butler examines how international human rights have come to be shaped by the discourses of "civilization" and how any ethical frameworks for human rights must first always interrogate what we allow to be "human".



Guantanamo Bay: A State of Exception
by Martin Puchner

In a critical engagement with the legal and territorial history of Guantanamo, Martin Puchner asks how the codification of the "state of exception" into U.S. law problematizes the limits of sovereignty, justice and law.



The Black Flag: Guantanamo Bay and the State of Exception
by Derek Gregory

Reflecting on both the history of colonial spaces and the legal systems that inhabit them, Gregory looks to Guantanamo Bay as a contemporary example of many of the systems of domination and violence that have accompanied much of our pasts.

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Fig. 3: Jumah Al-Dossari Center for Critical Studies page, Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History

The layered temporalities of the Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History are such that it promotes justice in both the present of the still-operating detention centers and a future in which commemoration is itself a form of retributive justice. In this second moment, the museum takes the form of a “site of conscience” as these are described by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. With a practical mandate that resonates

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Exploring the History of The Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History

When the last detention facility in Guantanamo Bay was officially decommissioned in 2010, an international team of artists, curators and architects began planning and designing a museum that would take the place of the detention facility - a little less than two years later, their work became reality. The purpose of the collaboration was both remember the human rights abuses that occurred while the prison was in operation while also providing a framework for combatting contemporary human rights abuses that continue to persist. The museum actively seeks to draw together a dynamic and mobile collectivity of artists, theorists, and other members of the public to create the conditions for reflection and imagination. *The Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History* officially opened its doors to the public in August of 2012.

But of course, the history of Guantanamo extends back further beyond the planning and construction of the museum - Closing the infamous prison required an extraordinary amount of creativity, collaboration and collective action. Following Barack Obama's order to close the detention camp in 2008, the United States congress, citing security concerns, quickly blocked the closure from proceeding and effectively halted the process to free the detainees who had been held without charges and also end the many other abuses from occurring, such as the many documented cases of torture and the denial of basic legal rights for detainees. It took more than 3 years for a concert of international human rights campaigns, groups of artists and curators organized in opposition to the prison, and coalitional social movements to finally manifest the political strength to shutter all of the facilities and halt their operations.

Obama signs order to close Guantanamo
Closure halted by congress
International campaign begins to close Guantanamo immediately
The direct-action group "No Pasaran" coordinates unprecedented day of action and blockades
Curators organize series of exhibitions to galvanize action against Guantanamo
Congress bows to international pressure and finalizes closure. The camp is soon decommissioned
Construction begins on the museum

A section of the historical wing of the museum is permanently dedicated to memorializing the social movements and organizations which ceaselessly worked for the closure of the camp. A photo exhibit documenting the dozens of blockades organized by the network of activists "No Pasaran" adorns the entrance to the exhibit. We also have included a library of exhibition catalogs from the various shows which manifested in opposition to the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, organized by the network of curators "Direct Art/Action". Inside, visitors will find an archive of media coverage of the various campaigns, as well as statements written by a diversity of organizations projected on the walls of the gallery space.

In framing this history of the present, it is our hope that in highlighting the diversity of practices and discourse which forced the closure of the prison that others will be able to draw from our praxis in future struggles for social justice. The museum offers free guided talks and discussions on both the history of the detention camp, its closure, as well as the processes that brought the museum into existence. If you are interested in organizing a visit to the museum, please [click here](#) to visit our page which will help facilitate your trip.

President Obama signs the order, officially closing the Guantanamo Bay Prison. (2008)

"No Pasaran" organizes blockades around the globe after congress halts the closure of the detention camp. (2010)

Visitors celebrating during the opening gala of the museum. (2012)

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Fig. 4: "Exploring the History of the Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History"

with Pierre Nora's work on *lieux de mémoire*, translated as "sites of memory," the ICSC was founded in 1999 with a mission to support transitional justice processes at a local level, through memorialization programs focused on place.⁶ It calls for recognizing historic sites, place-based museums and

⁶ Nora writes that "the *lieu de mémoire* is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations" (24).

memorials as “sites of conscience” that, in preserving the memory of a conflictive past, seek to “ensure a more just and humane future.” It “guides members in gold-standard documentation of past human rights atrocities and struggles for justice, and in applying history’s lessons to nurture civil society and prevent those abuses from recurring.” “Sites of conscience” fall under the purview of symbolic reparations, as these are conceived by the recently founded Symbolic Reparations Research Project. Indeed, ICSC Senior Director Ereshnee Naidu-Silvermans is author of an early study of “integrative reparations strategies”—measures that are both economic and symbolically commemorative—adopted by government, communities, and civil societies in post-apartheid South Africa. Such strategies represent an integrative approach, according a prominent role to commemorative art and practices, that the ICSC advocates.

In its “Guidelines on the Use of Art in Symbolic Reparations,” the Symbolic Reparations Research Project draws from a 2008 report by the United Nation’s Commissioner for Human Rights indicating that “in contrast to other benefits, symbolic measures derive their great potential from the fact that they are carriers of meaning,” and Colombia’s 2011 Ley de Víctimas [Victims’ Law], in which symbolic reparation is recognized as a category in itself, among other landmark statements, to affirm the importance of symbolic reparation for fostering post-conflict healing. Acknowledging that “all forms of reparations entail a social recognition of the injured that is inherently symbolic,” the guidelines suggest that “non-pecuniary symbolic reparations” are unique.

The guidelines of the Symbolic Reparations Research Project share with the Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History project more than the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience’s commitment to both a form of justice that represents post-conflict repair in the present and a refusal to repeat the horror of the past, the *nunca más* (“never again”) that became the driving force of transitional justice in Argentina. They also, and crucially, share a faith in the arts’ potential to envisage and enact repair at both a particular and a general level, precisely because of the openness—to interpretation and to the future—that the arts offer. It is in this emphasis that the SRRP builds upon the ICSC’s impetus to mark and preserve “sites of conscience”: “memorialization practices,” it insists, “necessarily draw on artistic and cultural forms, practices, and traditions to generate aesthetic experiences that are fundamental to engendering new perspectives and new modes of

social interaction” (2). The list of twelve “definitions” in which the guidelines culminate includes one titled “Aesthetics,” that elaborates on the centrality of the aesthetic experience to repair: “it is the open-ended, non-conclusive indeterminacy of the aesthetic experience that will provide symbolic reparations with the means through which to imagine productive social transformation” (4).

It is through the temporal conjunctions and possibilities for speculation that the aesthetic so-defined affords, and that the Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History draws on for its ambitious overlayings of time, that we might foresee a future for Guantánamo. This would be a future in which the naval base, or installations thereon, become a “site of memory” in the sense of others shepherded by the ICSC—a notorious prison and torture center reclaimed to honor the memory of its victims, like the Robben Island Museum in Cape Town or the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos in Buenos Aires, formerly a clandestine prison and torture center under the direction of the Navy Mechanics School. The political, legal, and economic obstacles to such a repurposing are glossed over in the timeline proposed on the project’s site—in whose version it is initiated by President Obama signing an order to close the detention camps and followed by protest on the part of Congress and advocacy groups. The project’s dual status, as a work of art and advocacy in our present that poses as an already-constructed site of memory in the future, invites its visitors to imagine not only that the camps are closed, but that a museum commemorating them may be possible. In this way the project both performs and anticipates symbolic reparation as the SRRP outlines it, drawing on the “non-conclusive indeterminacy of the aesthetic experience,” to make amends for a yet-to-be terminated pain.

Environmental Visions of the Future

The Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History defers reparation, but brings art into the service of repair in a conflation of present and future. The project itself is a work of art, as are the exhibits in its Tipton Three Gallery, while texts in its Center for Critical Studies both advocate for the end of atrocity at Guantánamo and, in the future perfect of the museum itself, serve as an archive of such advocacy. And yet repair in the aftermath of the detention camps is limited to neither the physical space of a museum nor to interpretations of the works it houses. In a perspective on conciliation that

looks not only to a moment of repair but also to the sustainability thereof, the museum extends its scope to the natural environment. Its “Plan Your Visit” section offers a three-day ecological tour that “includes a variety of activities which all engage with the broader ecological and geological history of the area.” The tour, visitors are advised, “begins with a group hike through ecological reserves where tourists will get to observe local wild-life.... On the second day, tourists are taken out of the waters of the bay to survey the various coasts with a team of local biologists as well as assist in taking water samples.” The rationale is “to help reverse much of the damage done to the bay” during its years as a military base: to repair, that is, for harm inflicted not only on people held at the base, but also on the area’s plant and animal life.

The ecological tours offered by the Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History resonate with a proposal for the future of the base that comes not from the creative arts, but from the more empirically driven field of environmental studies. A concern with damage to marine life around Guantánamo Bay, which in the museum project evolves from and is secondary to the closure of the detention centers, assumes greater prominence and more detailed analysis in the latter study. And yet in envisaging the future of Guantánamo—and in anticipating conciliation during a moment in which harm is still being done—the creative and the empirical complement one another in modelling collaboration rather than conflict, and in respecting and repairing life in its broadest sense. In March 2016, *Science* magazine published “Reboot Gitmo for U.S.-Cuba Research Diplomacy,” co-authored by conservation biologist Joe Roman and legal scholar James Kraska. Written at the most recent high point in U.S.-Cuba relations—when, after more than five decades of hostility between their two countries, Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro agreed to renew diplomatic relations—the article provides a road map for a use of the naval base consistent with the new (and, as it turned out, short-lived) political climate. The proposal comes in the wake of several high-profile calls for a return of the base to Cuban jurisdiction. Among these are not only Raúl Castro’s reported demand that this be a condition of a full restoration of relations and his brother Fidel’s earlier series of articles on the issue in the Cuban state newspaper *Granma*, published in English as the book *Guantánamo: Why the Illegal Base Should Be Returned to Cuba*, but also the position assumed publicly by, for example, Michael Parmly, former Chief of Mission at the United States Interests Section in Havana.

Roman and Kraska's proposal, however, does not advocate immediate Cuban control of the base. It is envisaged as a first step toward this end and it calls, in the interim, for a more conciliatory practice of cooperation between the two national powers sharing space in the Guantánamo region. Their proposal is as follows: "The United States should deliver on President Obama's recent plan to close the military prison at U.S. Naval Station Guantánamo Bay and repurpose the facilities into a state-of-the-art marine research institution and peace park, a conservation zone to help resolve conflicts between the two countries" (1258). The proposal omits analysis of Obama's failure to execute his plan, and it was met with derision by some with the political power to advance it: Jean Chemnick reports that Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.)'s reaction was "That's the dumbest thing I ever heard.... Why would we talk about a marine lab when we're trying to save American lives?" The rationale for the proposed institution is, nevertheless, detailed, beginning as an effort to help "meet the challenges of climate change, mass extinction, and declining coral reefs" (1258) that have been as much the concern of Cuban biologists and ecologists as they have of a broader international community (Baisre 370–373). "With a reduced U.S. footprint at Guantánamo," the proposal continues, "most of the land and sea could be returned to native wildlife" (1259): returned, that is, to an ideal in which political entities hold less dominion over land and sea and these are, rather, the home of the happily stateless animals whom writers on both side of Guantánamo's fence-line have perceived as enjoying extraordinary freedom. The Cuban poet José Ramón Sánchez, for example, writes of donkeys grazing unperturbed on the border between Cuba and the base, while Peter Hulme has commented on the ubiquity of border-crossing hummingbirds, iguanas, and banana rats at the camps recalled in detainee memoirs as reminders that, while the base may be isolated legally, it shares land with Cuba (394).

That the proposal should simultaneously make Guantánamo a "peace park" advances it as a potential "site of conscience." Its authors point to the first peace park as the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park on the border of Canada and the United States, "a symbol of goodwill between the countries" (1259), and both situate their proposal in a history of "successful transitions from military bases and conflict zones in other countries" (1259) and position it as a model for future conversions: "[T]he Guantánamo peace park and research center would encourage nations to convert military bases and conflict zones into areas of creativity, cooperation, and biodiversity con-

ervation” (1260). Although the arts do not play a major role in this vision of creative conciliation, they are not excluded; “even art, music, and design studios” (1259) might be among the repurposed spaces of the future naval base, alongside the “genetics laboratories, geographic information systems laboratories and videoconference rooms” (1259) that serve scientific collaboration.

Rather than being dominated by the U.S., or returned to Cuba, this proposal represents “a third path that would benefit Cuba, the U.S. and beyond” (1259); moreover, “the name Guantánamo could become associated with redemption and efforts to preserve and repair the planet” (1260). Through this “beyond,” and this hope of repairing “the planet,” preservation stands as a non-national ideal. In this regard, Roman and Kraska’s proposal, like the eco-tours of the Guantánamo Bay Museum of Art and History, align with the “planetary” consciousness that Rachel Price sees as displacing more narrowly defined identifications in the work of contemporary Cuban artists, as they respond to some of the same environmental concerns—spread of the marabú plant, rising water levels, contamination. Today, writes Price, “post-revolutionary” literature “reimagines Cuba as transiting from a small island nation with delusions—however justified—of world-historical grandeur, to an archipelago on a shrinking planet” (10). That the U.S.’s displays or delusions of historical grandeur at Guantánamo might cede to a broader sense of duty and care is the shared aspiration of both future-oriented projects, the Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History and Roman and Kraska’s proposal, despite their different origins. They find common ground in the environment and in creative practices, where ecological sustainability meets art’s power to imagine, create, and inhabit a future that is both possible and sustainable, and in which all forms of life are respected.

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U.S. MILITARY BASES AND STRATEGIC POLITICAL CULTURE IN CUBA*

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Abstract

U.S. efforts to establish multiple military bases in Cuba played a significant role in the articulation of Cuban nationalism as well as in the dynamics of the relations between both countries in the twentieth century. Sharing numerous insights related to the history of U.S. operations at Guantánamo Bay, this essay shows that controversies surrounding the issue of U.S. military bases in Cuba impacted political discourse on the island both before and after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. It contextualizes the militarization of the Caribbean region in terms of shifting international dynamics and suggests that Guantánamo Bay is a powerful symbol within a strategic political culture that defines possible U.S. aggression as the main threat to Cuba's security.

Keywords: the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuban nationalist discourse, Cuban-U.S. political relations

Resumen

Esfuerzos para establecer múltiples bases militares en Cuba por EE.UU. desempeñaron un papel significativo tanto en la articulación del nacionalismo cubano como en la dinámica de las relaciones entre ambos países en el siglo xx. Este ensayo presenta varios conocimientos acerca de la historia de las operaciones estadounidenses en la Bahía de Guantánamo. Además, se demuestra que las controversias que rodeaban el asunto de las bases militares en Cuba impactaron el discurso político en la isla antes y después de la revolución cubana de 1959. Contextualiza la militarización de la región caribeña en términos de una cambiante dinámica internacional y sugiere que la Bahía de Guantánamo es un símbolo poderoso en una cultura política que define la potencial agresión de EE.UU. como la principal amenaza a la seguridad de Cuba.

Palabras clave: la base naval estadounidense en la Bahía de Guantánamo, discurso nacionalista de Cuba, relaciones políticas entre Cuba y Estados Unidos

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The topic of U.S. bases, and of U.S.-Cuba military relations more generally, is one of great relevance to U.S.-Cuba relations in the twentieth century. It has been a factor in the formulation of Cuban nationalism, expressed both in historiography and political discourse, and in the formation of a strategic culture that defines the U.S. as the main threat to Cuba's independence and its viability as a nation. To understand the strong symbolic role that U.S. interest in permanent military bases in Cuba has played, analysis should take into account events and conflicts that emerged at the time of the War of 1898, the subsequent period of military rule, and the circumstances of Cuban independence in 1902. It should also be stressed that the issue of U.S. military bases in Cuba did not arise after 1959 in relation to Guantánamo Bay, but was a recurrent theme of nationalist discourse throughout the Republican period (1902 to 1959).¹ This essay does not deal with the topic of the Soviet Union's military installations and how political discourse differentiated its presence from that of the U.S., though it would be an interesting question for future research.

Throughout the nineteenth century, there was considerable U.S. interest in Cuba's strategic position astride major sea lanes, its controlling position of key straits (i.e., the Yucatán Channel, the Windward Passage, and the Straits of Florida), and its valuable harbors. U.S. efforts to annex Cuba or purchase it from Spain responded partly to this strategic interest. Geopolitical strategy was also a factor that motivated U.S. attempts to obtain control of Samaná Bay in the Dominican Republic.

Just prior to the War of 1898, the U.S. naval officer and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan reviewed the geostrategic features of the entire region in his 1897 article "The Strategic Features of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea." In this article, Mahan identified the need for U.S. naval bases in the Caribbean. He placed great emphasis on the need to control the Windward Passage (the strait between eastern Cuba and northwest Haiti) if a trans-isthmian canal was to be built in Central America. He also underscored the strategic importance of Cuba, which he linked to the country's long coastline, as well as its commanding position, its large size, natural resources, and other geographic features. Mahan identified three specific

¹ The Republican period is sometimes called the neocolonial period by the current government. It began when Cuba seceded from U.S. rule in 1902. This event followed the defeat of Spanish forces in 1898. The period ended when the revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro took power in 1959.

cities as desirable locations for the bases: La Habana, Cienfuegos, and Santiago de Cuba.

Mahan served the U.S. as a member of the Naval War Board during the War of 1898. The Board recommended to the Secretary of the Navy, John D. Long, that new bases be established in Puerto Rico and that “the United States should control the Windward Passage through which our commerce must pass on the way to the canal from our northern ports.”² Of course the U.S. had invaded and seized Puerto Rico in July of 1898. Later, in 1901, the General Board of the Navy recommended that bases be acquired in two places within Cuba: Cienfuegos and Guantánamo.

The Platt Amendment

Serving as Military Governor of Cuba from 1899 to 1902, U.S. Army General Leonard Wood tried to make a number of changes in the Cuban Constitution. The change that provoked the most resistance had to do with military bases. On March 2, 1901, the Army Appropriations Bill included what is known as the Platt Amendment for incorporation into the Cuban Constitution. It was a precondition for Cuba’s independence and the withdrawal of the remaining U.S. troops from the island. The Platt Amendment stipulated the right of the U.S. to intervene in Cuba and to acquire an indeterminate number of bases on the island. The proviso for the bases was included in Article VII, where it was framed in terms that linked their establishment to a future in which the U.S. would be able to use them to protect Cuba’s independence as well as its people:

That to enable the United States to maintain the independence of Cuba, and to protect the people thereof, as well as for its own defense, the government of Cuba will sell or lease to the United States lands necessary for coaling or naval stations at certain specified points to be agreed upon with the President of the United States.³

² For details of Mahan’s views about the importance of a canal in Nicaragua or Panama and control over the Windward Passage, see his *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future* (1897).

³ “The Platt Amendment,” in *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America, 1776–1949*, vol. 8, ed. C.I. Bevans (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), pp. 1116–17.

With few other options, the Cuban government was forced to consider this condition and the seven others in the amendment. However, bases and interventionism were perceived at the outset as part of an imposed arrangement (“*plattismo*”) that made Cuban sovereignty vulnerable. *Plattismo* became a central feature of what has been called the “neocolonial Republic” in recent Cuban historiography.

The Platt Amendment provoked great controversy in the Cuban Constitutional Convention and was adopted with reluctance by a majority of a single vote. Later its provisions were incorporated into a treaty that was signed on May 22, 1903 and ratified on July 2, 1904.

The Cuban Revolution of 1933 against President Gerardo Machado, which is also known as the Sergeants’ Revolt, brought about an upsurge in nationalist feeling.⁴ In this context the U.S. government decided to both abandon the Platt Amendment and to officially relinquish any claim to Bahia Honda. These changes occurred in 1934. Made in the context of the Good Neighbor Policy, they were part of an attempt to dampen nationalist feelings among Cubans while also improving relations between the U.S. and Latin America.⁵ Nevertheless, the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay remained. With a land border between the U.S. and Cuba, it stood out as the latter’s only symbol of direct U.S. military presence in its domestic space.

The issue of U.S. base rights stands out as a major bone of contention between the U.S. and Cuba since the beginning of the twentieth century. It is an issue that, together with the interventions of the early part of the century, fueled Cuban nationalism for decades thereafter.

U.S. Plans for Multiple Bases in Cuba

The U.S. wanted to retain not only Guantánamo Bay for the establishment of a base, but also other locations: Tricornia, Bahia Honda, Cienfuegos, and Nipe. This desire was compounded by the controversy over the sovereignty of the Isle of Pines, which the U.S. had retained, in part due to strategic con-

⁴ Gerardo Machado y Morales served as a general in the Cuban War of Independence. From 1925 to 1933, he was President of Cuba.

⁵ Roosevelt referred to the Good Neighbor Policy in his 1933 inaugural address. His administration denounced intervention in the internal and external affairs of other nations and strived to build a platform for friendly future relations with Central and South American countries.

siderations. The base planned for Triscornia would have been in the harbor of Havana, just across from the city. It would have been a permanent military presence in plain view of the city's residents. Cuban authorities strongly objected to this installation and the U.S. eventually relented.

Once Triscornia was dropped, the U.S. demanded bases at the four other sites. Later, U.S. demands were reduced to two of them: Bahia Honda and Guantánamo Bay. This followed considerable Cuban opposition to the establishment of a base in Cienfuegos.

U.S. Naval Priorities

In 1903, Bahia Honda and Guantánamo Bay were officially leased to the United States, but there was no great interest in Bahia Honda, since a base there would have been redundant, given bases in Tampa and Key West. It was never developed. Debates regarding which place should be the main U.S. naval base in the Caribbean emerged in military circles in the 1910s and 1920s: Culebra, Puerto Rico, or Guantánamo Bay. Authorities decided to develop Guantánamo Bay and to maintain Culebra as an auxiliary base.

Differences regarding the size of the space to be occupied by the naval base at Guantánamo Bay also arose. The U.S. Navy wanted to control a ten-mile radius from Fort Toro; however, this plan was abandoned due to Cuban objections, and its present size agreed upon, at least initially.

However, the decision to not develop a base at Bahia Honda was used in an attempt to negotiate an enlargement of the base at Guantánamo Bay. The U.S. Navy wanted to improve the water supply of the base by constructing a dam in a nearby river. The expansion involved the incorporation of 40,000 additional acres. A 1912 agreement to enlarge the base was not approved by the Cuban Senate. The issue came up again in 1919, but it was dropped in 1921. Thus, the limits of the Guantánamo Bay base have remained the same to this day. The matter of Cuban control over its access to water came up after the 1959 revolution when the Cuban government interrupted supply to the base in response to the U.S. military's apprehension of several fishermen.

Cuban Historiography

It would be useful to analyze how post-1898 Cuban historiography has dealt with these conflicts about the establishment of U.S. military bases on the

country's soil. The hypothesis presented here is that perspectives concerning the issue within Cuba were inspired by José Martí's views on the U.S. hegemonic pretensions during the War of Independence and then developed as a nationalist discourse, one within which U.S. pressure for bases on the island and Cuban resistance to these demands were both underscored.

Many Cuban historians developed a geopolitical perspective that strongly conditioned their interpretation of U.S.-Cuban relations. Among them can be mentioned Ramiro Guerra, Emeterio Santovenia, Calixto Masó, Carlos Marquez Sterling, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Julio Le Riverend, José Luciano Franco, and Herminio Portell Vilá, among others. Some of them played roles in post-1959 Cuba. Others were liberals who went into exile, among them individuals such as Portell Vilá, Márquez Sterling, and Calixto Masó. Scholars' formulations contributed, at different historical junctures, to the articulation of a nationalistic political discourse that defined the U.S. as a permanent threat to Cuba's independence and national integrity. This historical interpretation is an important component of Cuba's political culture.

World War II and Beyond

During the World War II, the U.S. base structure in the Caribbean was significantly enlarged through the destroyers-for-bases agreement between Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. Large contingents of U.S. troops were deployed throughout the region. The entire Caribbean became the "American Mediterranean," to use Mahan's metaphor.

After the war, the U.S. gradually dismantled this base structure. Some of these bases, Chaguaramas in Trinidad, for example, were factors in the emerging nationalist movements. Eric Williams, later to become Prime Minister of Trinidad, led the movement against Chaguaramas. In Panama, the extensive U.S. installations also provoked nationalist opposition. The trend of dismantling the base structure in the Caribbean culminated after the end of the Cold War with the closure of the Roosevelt Roads Naval Station in Puerto Rico in 2004.

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 brought to the fore nationalist demands for the withdrawal of the U.S. military presence in Guantánamo Bay. In the sixties, Fidel Castro defined Guantánamo as a "provocation" that should not be dealt with through military means. During the Cold War, conflicts around the base of Guantánamo became sharper as U.S.-Cuban relations

were marked by intense mutual hostility. Much has been attributed to the incident with the U.S. sailors apprehended by Raúl Castro in shaping Cuban attitudes to the base, but the conflict has deeper historical roots and did not begin in the post-1959 period, as suggested above.

The base at Guantánamo lost all military value in an armed conflict with Cuba as it was surrounded by hostile territory. In the 1980s, it was used to detain Haitian migrants and, later, it became an interrogation center and prison in the War on Terror. Guantánamo remains the sole major U.S. military installation in the entire Caribbean region and a sort of remnant from previous periods. Quite possibly, it has been retained due to political considerations related to U.S.-Cuban relations rather than for its geostrategic importance. The U.S. has all necessary capabilities in its own territory to confront regional contingencies and, in fact, does not perceive major military challenges in the region. Neither does it seem to be an extremely important or urgent issue to Cuba, as it is concerned with pressing economic problems. At the time of this writing, the base's value is also linked to its status as a place where the U.S. can operate an offshore military prison and other facilities in which prisoners, detainees, migrants, and others without extending them the protections that they would enjoy if held in the U.S. It is in this role that this space impacts political discourses about security, terrorism, and war at the international level.

Regarding the future, the space may still play a role in the shaping of nationalist discourse and in the reproduction of a strategic culture that defines potential aggression from the U.S. as the main threat to Cuba's security. Eventually, the redefinition of U.S. relations with Cuba will require that those involved consider the closure of the last remaining base. This will be a complex issue. How can the U.S. take this step without it being considered a unilateral concession to an authoritarian regime? And how can Cuba negotiate an issue that is considered a matter of principle, one that is not subject to *quid pro quos*?

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“THIS PLACE IS AUSTRALIA ITSELF”: MANUS, GUANTÁNAMO, AND EMBODIED LITERARY RESISTANCE IN BEHROUZ BOOCHANI’S NO FRIEND BUT THE MOUNTAINS*

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Abstract

Manus Island in Papua New Guinea is called “Australia’s Guantánamo” by critics of its use as a detention site for refugees, including Behrouz Boochani, a poet, journalist, filmmaker, and refugee imprisoned there by the Australian government for almost six years. This essay explores the usefulness and limitations of Guantánamo as a metaphor to describe Manus and other sites in Australia’s offshore detention regime. In addition, it argues that Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018) counters displacement and the dehumanization of refugees through literary language. Moving beyond testimony, Boochani produces a poetical, critical, and embodied response to Australia’s silencing and erasure of refugees.

Keywords: Guantánamo Bay, Manus, Australia refugee policy, refugees, Behrouz Boochani

Resumen

La isla de Manus en Papúa Nueva Guinea se conoce como “el Guantánamo de Australia” por las personas que critican su uso como lugar para la detención de refugiados, entre ellos el poeta, periodista y cineasta Behrouz Boochani. El gobierno australiano mantiene a Boochani preso en la isla, por casi ya seis años. Este ensayo explora la utilidad y las limitaciones del uso de Guantánamo como metáfora para describir Manus y otros lugares que forman parte del régimen de detención ultramarino de Australia. Además, sostiene que el libro *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018) de Boochani reba-

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te el desplazamiento y la deshumanización de los refugiados mediante un lenguaje literario. Más allá del testimonio, Boochani responde a la invisibilización y al silenciamiento de los refugiados por el gobierno de Australia con una obra poética, crítica y empoderada.

Palabras clave: Bahía de Guantánamo, Isla de Manus, política de asilo de Australia, refugiados, Behrouz Boochani

*A skeletal man with light-coloured eyes /
Holding a soaking book of poetry /
His feet held tightly in a pair of flip-flops /
This is all there is.*

—Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend but the Mountains*

Introduction

Manus Island is the “Australian Guantanamo,” according to Kurdish-Iranian poet, journalist, filmmaker, and refugee, Behrouz Boochani (Green and Dao 4). Yet even as Boochani conjures this metaphor to describe Australia’s offshore processing camp for asylum seekers and refugees in Papua New Guinea, where he has been detained for six years, he acknowledges its inadequacy: “This prison is more than a prison. I always use ‘Guantanamo.’ And I believe that ‘Australian Guantanamo’ is not enough for this prison, not enough. But I don’t have any other words” (4).

This essay has two broad aims. First, I unpack the connection between ‘Guantánamo’ and ‘Manus’—both the usefulness of this metaphor and its limitations. Second, I explore the many other words that Boochani *has* found, since his above comment in 2017, with the publication of his groundbreaking and genre-defying work, *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* (2018).

Written via thousands of WhatsApp messages and translated from Farsi into English by Omid Tofighian, this poetical account of life on Manus represents a decolonial, visceral, critical, and literary intervention into Australian public life. Myth and metaphor about refugees in Australian political discourse serve to “dis-place” Australia’s offshore detention regime, to borrow Suvendrini Perera’s term, from its geography and from its colonial and carceral histories, as well as obfuscating human rights violations (6). I argue that *No Friend* counters this dis-placement through its literary representations of life on Manus, inviting both an analytical and emotional engagement with Australia’s past, present, and future.

In imagining the possibilities of a literary work like Boochani’s in this essay, it is helpful to consider Judith Butler’s idea of the “prison break” as represented by poetry written by detainees in the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo Bay, Gitmo, and published by the University of Iowa Press (11). Butler

suggests that the circulation of this prison poetry breaks with the context and conditions of its creation simply by escaping, and in doing so creates new contexts and possibilities: “the poetry leaves the prison, if it does, even when the prisoner cannot” (9). The poetry itself does not free the prisoner, but the emotional reactions it provokes in its readership—“astonishment, outrage, revulsion, admiration, and discovery”—create the conditions for action that break with the acceptance of war and human rights violations, and push for justice (11). Butler’s discussion of war here is not limited to U.S. invasions overseas; she points out that immigration issues are frequently framed as a “war at home” (26). As I will show, Australia’s militarised refugee policies have consistently been framed as such, in addition to their explicit links with the global ‘War on Terror.’

A journalist by training, Boochani regularly contributes to local and international news publications from Manus Island, such as *The Guardian*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Age*, and *The Saturday Paper*. However, journalistic language is limited, he argues, in its capacity to “analyse and express the extent of the torture in this place,” because, by nature, these articles are for “the general public” (xv). The “realities of this place,” Boochani tells Tofghian, “can be better exposed through the language of art and literature” (360). Boochani’s tireless journalistic reporting is clearly worded and concise, focused on exposing inconsistencies, lies, and injustices. His literary turn in *No Friend* appeals to a different response in readers, experimenting with poetry and metaphor to conjure the horror, despair, and human suffering that is lived in the bodies, minds, and hearts of those imprisoned by the Australian government.

This is especially important when “literary” methods have been co-opted by political rhetoric to dehumanise refugees and justify the violence enacted upon them. Language matters; as legal scholar Justine Poon demonstrates, when a body becomes a boat in law; that is, when a person seeking refuge becomes an “unauthorized maritime arrival,” the person in question is objectified and legal subjectivity diminished (106). “This metaphorical shift” in Australian law, Poon writes, “then defines how the rest of the legal system and its actors view them and the limits of what can be done to them” (109). In his own shift, away from journalistic to literary writing, Boochani explores the limits of human suffering and redefines how refugees are portrayed. Significantly, it is an imprisoned refugee doing the portraying, weaving poetry into memoir in conditions of physical danger—riots, violence, starvation,

sickness, heat—via the unlikely means of WhatsApp. Like the ephemeral “cup poems” etched into styrofoam and shared by detainees in the U.S. prison at Guantánamo Bay, later reconstructed from memory and reproduced in *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak* (2007), the very existence of *No Friend* is both a defiant response to the prison regime and a testament to fragility and precariousness; to the life and words that have not survived it.

In this essay I want to emphasise the potential that creative works have to stimulate an affecting, poetic rupture in the representation of refugees in Australia. Boochani’s text is often intimate in its grotesque, visceral details and vulnerable disclosure of mental anguish, loneliness, self-hatred, and petty thoughts. These personal, embodied aspects of human experience serve to further strengthen, as I will argue, *No Friend’s* sustained critique of structural and political power. In these and other ways, I propose that in *No Friend but the Mountains* Boochani goes beyond traditional refugee testimony to critically analyse the conditions of his imprisonment and powerfully represent life on Manus. In doing so, he contributes to a formidable tradition of prison writing which includes works like *Poems from Guantánamo* (2007) and former Gitmo detainee Moazzam Begg’s memoir *Enemy Combatant* (2006), while also exposing the shared global histories from which these sites spring, thereby countering politicised mythology by placing them in specific parameters of time and space.

Conjuring ‘Guantánamo’: Usefulness and Limitations of the Metaphor

‘Guantánamo’ is frequently evoked in reference to Australia’s offshore detention of refugees and asylum seekers in two sites: the Pacific island nation of Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The metaphor is efficient: it succinctly conveys the lawlessness, secrecy, silence, and abuse of human rights that Australia’s offshore camps share with the U.S. military base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Immigration detention centres also operate onshore in Australia, but it is the horrific conditions for those living in its offshore camps, including children, that are openly presented as a deterrence method that is said to prevent further arrivals by boat.¹ Refugees on Manus

¹ In the final stages of editing this essay, the last children detained on Nauru were relocated along with their families to the U.S. (Awasthi). But as one chapter in the offshore detention regime closes, another begins, with the Australian government announcing plans to re-open its previously closed detention centre on Christmas Island (Murphy).

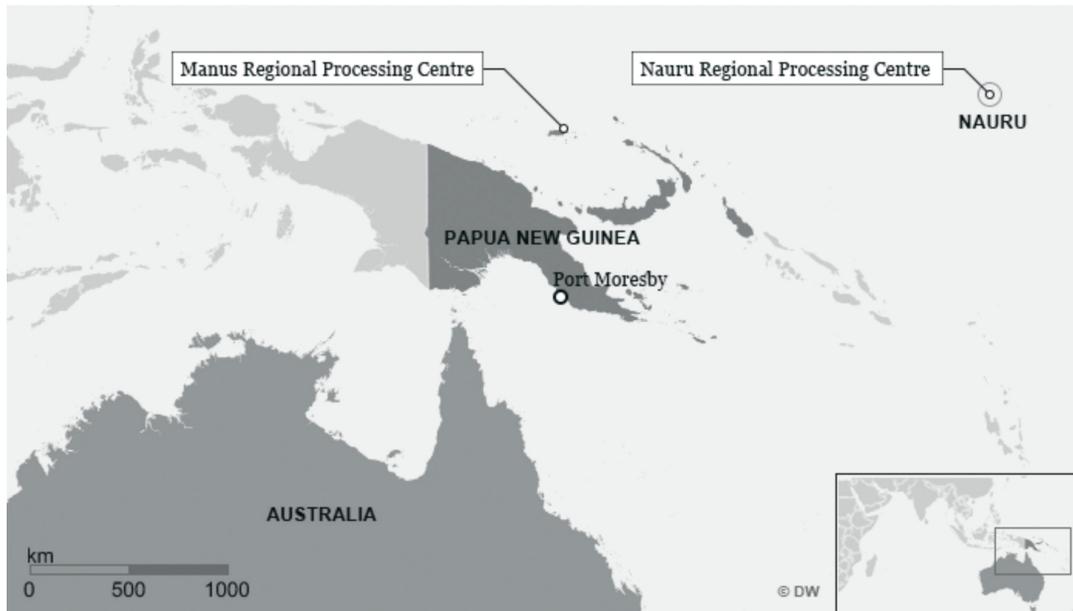


Fig. 1: Map of two of Australia’s offshore regional processing centres in the Pacific, on Manus Island and Nauru. Source: *Deutsche Welle*, 2018

and Nauru therefore live, with the knowledge and consent of a majority of Australians, as political hostages. In Boochani’s words: “we are being made examples to strike fear into others, to scare people so they won’t come to Australia” (*No Friend* 107). Like the U.S. government’s prison within the base at Guantánamo, violations of refugees’ human rights are often denied and simultaneously presented as a necessary, if unfortunate, element of national security—in limbo legally, physically, and psychologically.

Australia’s offshoring policies for asylum seekers also share roots in the global War on Terror. Although mandatory detention of asylum seekers was introduced by a left-wing government in 1992, Australia’s current militarised discourse on refugees and its obsession with boat arrivals, both in parliament and in the media, can be traced back to conservative Prime Minister John Howard’s handling of the “Tampa affair” in August 2001, shortly before the 9/11 attacks (*Asylum Insight*). Refusing safe harbour to the Norwegian freighter *Tampa*, which had rescued around 450 asylum seekers from a sinking, overcrowded boat, Howard’s flailing government capitalised on the post-9/11 atmosphere of fear and racial politics (Perera 55).² It proved

² Sources provide varying figures of the asylum seekers rescued by the *Tampa*: 433 (National Museum of Australia); 440 (Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House); “450 or so” (Perera 55).

the pivotal moment in that November’s domestic elections, with Howard sweeping to power (Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House). The campaign is best distilled in words from his infamous speech: “we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come” (Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House).

As Perera writes, for those men, women, and children saved by the *Tampa* but then forcibly transferred by the Australian military to Nauru, “worlds changed around them: they now faced the full force of the backlash from the 9/11 attacks, the anticipated war in Afghanistan, and a climate of heightened hostility and suspicion toward anyone who might fit the category of ‘Muslim’ or Middle Eastern” (69-70). The refugees caught on the *Tampa* were guinea pigs and a catalyst for the hastily arranged negotiations with Australia’s neighbours in Nauru and Manus, which the Australian government called the “Pacific Solution” (55). The Nazi echoes in this phrasing are apparently shameless, yet appropriate.

The legal bases for offshore detention are complex, constantly changing, and sensitive to Australian electoral cycles, not to mention deliberately shrouded in secrecy by the Australian government. In this context, ‘Guantánamo’ is often the most efficient, horrifying and ultimate comparison: a call for urgent change. Legal and medical scholars have used the association to draw attention to Australia’s violations of its obligations under the UN Convention Against Torture, citing both the generalised conditions—unsanitary environments, systemic sexual and physical abuse, self-harm and psychological distress caused by indefinite imprisonment—as well as specific actions like waterboarding (Morales; Sanggaran and Zion 420).³ Aside from torture, the legal status of Australia’s offshore detention regime is inspired by Guantánamo’s history. Australia’s amended Migration Act in 2001 excised more than 4,800 portions of its own sovereign territory, mainly islands, in order to deem them “non-Australia” for the purposes of seeking asylum (Baldacchino 61). This move was directly inspired by the denial of asylum to Haitians at

³ The Australian government’s justification of conditions on Nauru and Manus as a deterrence measure is both brazen and insidious. My own shock on reading this account of waterboarding in fact revealed to me that I, like most Australians, had to some extent accepted or at least normalised the generalised conditions of torture that are frequently reported on by Australian media, yet remain unchanged. Accounts of systemic sexual abuse horrify but no longer shock; accounts of waterboarding still retain this power. This also reveals the potency of the Guantánamo comparison and why it continues to be employed.

Guantánamo Bay in the 1980s and '90s on the basis of it being a “lawless enclave’ outside US jurisdiction” (61).⁴

However, as Boochani makes clear in the observations that open this essay, Guantánamo as a metaphor is limited. Significantly, in the same move that seeks to condemn all that it represents, conjuring Guantánamo can also perpetuate imperialist/colonialist thinking, in two important ways. The first is that, while the global influence of the U.S. on its smaller allies such as Australia is undeniable, continuing to centre U.S. politics can lead critics and other observers to overlook the ways in which these black sites operate in a mutual feedback loop. While Guantánamo is certainly a “key site in the symbolic order that is being structured by the United States in the twenty-first century” (Coleman 39), when contemplating futures, one of the goals of this volume of writing on Guantánamo, it is important to consider what becomes possible in a feedback loop of what Perera terms “geopolitical reciprocity.” As Perera writes, “between the modalities of territorial dominion and imperial control that characterize relations between the United States and the islands of Cuba and Haiti on the one hand, and on the other, the forms of variable sovereignty that Australia exercises over its outlying territories, former colonies and protectorates” (8).⁵ Will Guantánamo always remain the ultimate, superlative comparison? If so, what extremities does this conceal within Australia’s own black sites? What is specific about Australia’s colonising, extra-legal, and illegal relations ‘at home’ and in the region? And what will Manus inspire the U.S. to do at Guantánamo Bay?

⁴ These links with Guantánamo’s lawlessness are further emphasised by a group called Researchers Against Pacific Black Sites (RAPBS), who explain their deliberate use of the term “black site” to refer to Australia’s offshore detention regime. Usually reserved for U.S. secret prisons and locations used in the War on Terror, RAPBS employs “black site” in relation to Manus and Nauru “in order to highlight their structural connections with other extra-legal or illegal places of confinement, abuse and torture” (Researchers Against Pacific Black Sites). Similar motivations are clear in Boochani’s evocation of Guantánamo: to convey the Australian government’s illegal activities and its “complex torture” of refugees through a globally recognised symbol (Boochani, qtd. in Dao and Green 10).

⁵ Unexpected Australian-Caribbean connections have already been made through Boochani’s contribution to the Maroon Conference Magazine, 2017 (Boochani, “Kyriarchal System”), which was edited by Indigenous Warrimay historian Victoria Grieves of the University of Sydney. The volume also includes an article by Boochani’s translator, Omid Tofghian.

The dangerous possibilities of “geopolitical reciprocity” are apparent in the first official phone call between U.S. President Donald Trump and then Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, which took place in 2016. The two leaders wrestled over a resettlement deal for refugees on Manus arranged with the Obama administration, one that Trump wanted to abandon. During the call, Turnbull assures Trump of Australia’s “strong” stance on security and border politics, pointing out “how our policies have helped to inform your approach. We are very much of the same mind” (“Full Transcript”). Turnbull’s emphasis here seems to backfire, however, as instead of inspiring Trump to resettle the Manus refugees in the U.S. he considers adopting the approach of offshore detention: “That is a good idea. We should do that too. You are worse than I am” (“Full Transcript”). Academic and journalistic writing frequently warns that Australia’s harsh treatment of refugees could be adopted by other countries in the Global North that are faced with both far greater numbers of refugee and migrant arrivals and more extremist and divisive internal politics (Sanggaran and Zion; Baldacchino). It is essential to acknowledge that Australia can and does ‘pioneer’ human rights abuses of its own accord and that what Trump calls “a good idea” may inspire the U.S. and other countries to introduce or reinstate similar regimes.

The second issue is that the use of metaphor perpetuates imperial displacement, part of the same obfuscating processes of erasure that dis-locate islands from their historical, cultural, and geographical realities. Metaphor performs dispossession: conceptually, if not legally, Guantánamo Bay no longer belongs to Cubans. For many Australians, too, Manus and Nauru are concepts that exist only in Australian newspaper reports and parliamentary debates, dis-placed from their real, geographical locations in the Pacific Ocean. Australia’s infringement on the sovereignty of its Pacific neighbours is thus both literal and conceptual. As Godfrey Baldacchino writes, “The onshore space of one sovereign country becomes, perversely, the offshore space of/for a totally different one” (61). Significantly, this symbolic thinking also untethers black sites from history, erasing the steps leading to their creation. For example, employing Guantánamo as a metaphor with global resonance usually conjures the “iconic orange jumpsuits” of those detained in the War on Terror (Coleman 39). The power of this image then means that even as Guantánamo is deployed to discuss Australia’s treatment of refugees, the human rights abuses of Haitian refugees detained by the U.S. at the same site in earlier decades is overlooked or erased.

Ahistorical and one-dimensional thinking means that even those who oppose the crimes committed at Guantánamo often frame them as an aberration to, or departure from, fundamental U.S. values (Walicek 67). Doing so fails to locate twenty-first century crimes committed by the U.S. within the continuity of its long racist and militarised imperial presence in Cuba, Haiti, and throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, not to mention the Middle East. As recent scholarship has shown, the abuses and violations that Haitian refugees suffered at Guantánamo Bay—along with the nineteenth-century U.S. invasion and illegal occupation of Cuba’s territory—are essential to understanding the crisis at this site in the twenty-first century (Walicek 70). Opposition to Australia’s offshore detention regime is frequently mounted in similar terms, as an aberration, with disturbing disregard for its carceral and colonial histories ‘at home’ and in the region. Many Australians may remain unaware, for example, that PNG is a former protectorate of Australia (Perera 65). This aberration narrative is apparent in the words of Judith Reem, a former teacher on Nauru who explains, in an *Al Jazeera* interview, her reasons for risking prosecution by speaking out against the horrors that she witnessed while working with refugee children:

I am just so ashamed that this is the way Australia is behaving in the world’s largest refugee crisis [. . .] I just think . . . that we’re a different country, this is not who we are. This is not what Australians think of themselves. We believe that we’re good people, and that we care for the vulnerable and the sick, and that we give everyone a fair go. We’re not a nation that tortures people. We don’t lock people up for three years, especially not children. (“Nauru”)⁶

Without diminishing Reem’s urgent and courageous motivations for speaking out, I want to more closely interrogate the two ideas that she articulates, which are related but distinct: “this is not who we are” and “this is not what Australians think of themselves.”

⁶ At the time Reem spoke out, the Border Force Act 2015 had introduced penalties of up to two years imprisonment for staff, including medical practitioners, who disclose “protected information” outside what medical experts John-Paul Sanggaran and Deborah Zion have called “demonstrably failed internal channels” (421). Sanggaran and Zion point out that this kind of secrecy and silence are at the core of human rights abuses (421).

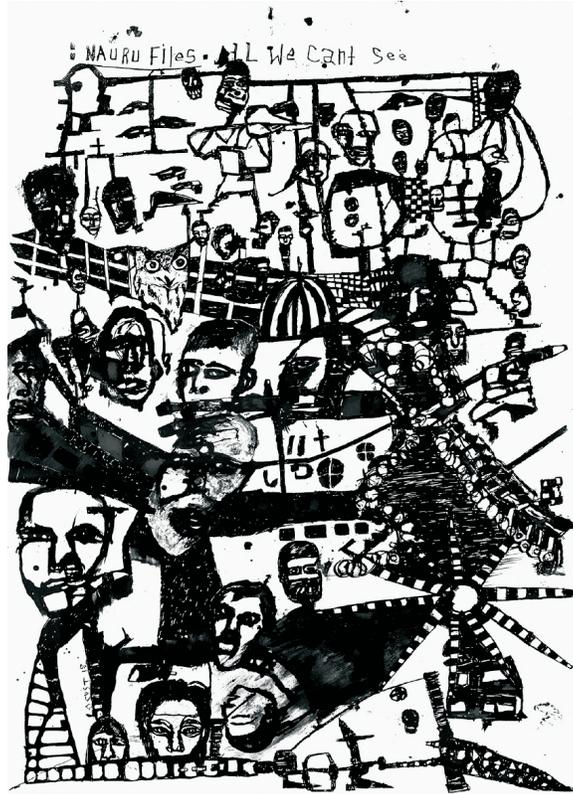


Fig. 2: Locust Jones. “Senior child protection work witness client hitting himself over the head with a rock and chair, than [sic] banging head into walls”⁷

Even a cursory investigation of Australian history and contemporary politics suggests that Australia has a long and racist tradition of ‘locking people up’ in contravention of international torture conventions, including children.

⁷ *All We Can't See: Illustrating the Nauru Files* is a project initiated by Arielle Gamble and Daniel New, which aims to counter the secrecy of Australia's offshore detention regime. It encourages the public to read and respond to The Nauru Files—the name for more than 2,000 incident reports that were leaked by staff working in Australia's detention centre on Nauru between 2013 and 2015, and published by *The Guardian* in August 2016. The project aims to raise awareness about the situation on Nauru (and by extension, Manus); to humanise and individualise the stories in the case files; to engage people in reading the files through the “power and immediacy of visual language”; and to witness and offer a testament to suffering. The files document incidences of self-harm, sexual assault, abuse of children, violence, and generally abhorrent conditions; both the files and the artworks can be viewed at allwecantsee.com/incidents. In the case of the files used in this essay, the name cited refers to the artist who responded to the case file, not the individual or individuals detained on Nauru, as their names are redacted in the incident reports. At the time of this writing, many files are yet to be illustrated.

“Offshoring” itself is a consistent strategy in the nation’s history. Aside from the mainland’s origins as a British penal colony (the original Pacific Solution?), smaller islands have frequently been used as prisons: for Indigenous people, like Wadjemup/Rottnest Island in Western Australia (Melville), or in the nineteenth century for convicts who misbehaved (Baldacchino 60). What Baldacchino calls Australia’s “macabre Matryoshka doll [of] multiple insularity” (60) describes, I argue, a carceral tradition that is not aberrant to the country’s history but instead foundational. The incarceration and mistreatment of refugees is consistent with many aspects of Australia’s history, especially violent colonisation, denial of Indigenous sovereignty, and the disproportionate policing and institutionalisation of Indigenous peoples, all representing the sustained defence of Australia’s “white heart” (Ricatti 483).

Anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rhetoric is directly linked to anxiety about Australia’s colonising history and, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson has argued, the assertion of white sovereignty. The “discourse of security” deployed against migrants and so-called illegal immigrants, she writes, is “inextricably linked to an anxiety about dispossession shaped by a refusal of Indigenous sovereignty with clear roots in white supremacy” (152). However, acknowledgement of Australia’s status as a violently invaded settler-colonial state, where sovereignty has never been ceded by First Nations peoples, continues to be a controversial and contested issue in public discourse. This is the heart of the so-called culture wars stoked by former Prime Minister John Howard over the place of celebration or remorse in how Australian colonial history is taught in schools (Birch 8-9). It continues today in heated media and political debates over the celebration of the national holiday, Australia Day, known by Indigenous activists and their allies as Invasion Day or Survival Day, and in militarised attitudes to Indigenous communities. In 2007, Howard’s government deployed the military in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, claiming to address epidemic child sexual abuse (Perera 131). Yet as recently as 2016, systemic abuse and assault of detained minors was exposed in the state’s own prisons, widely compared in mainstream media to “something out of Guantanamo Bay” (Lawford). As of late 2018, one hundred percent of minors detained in the Northern Territory were Indigenous (NITV).

The more accurate statement, then, may be that “this is not what Australians think of themselves” (“Nauru”). Both advocates and opponents of Australia’s refugee policies often adopt historical blindness by drawing on

a mythical golden age in the nation—either a return to the “White Australia” immigration policy, which was not completely dismantled until 1975, or to the period after, when the (white) nation generously opened its arms to migrants and refugees from Asia (Ricatti 482). Both attitudes reinforce what Francesco Ricatti calls the “moral privilege of whiteness—that is, the emotional centrality of whiteness in defining the Australian nation’s core values” evident in the discourse of advocates who argue that we once were a different, *better* country, and can return to this time (478). The nostalgic call to an authentic Australianness is reflected, I argue, in pro-refugee campaigns like “*Real Australians Say Welcome*,” as well as in successive right-wing governments’ admiration for 1950s-era conservatism (Sainty; emphasis mine). Australia’s obsessive, cyclical debates about migration and multiculturalism actually consolidate whiteness, even as they perform an opening up, by continuing to centre white nationals as the managers of the Australia national space (Hage 233).

In encouraging historians to challenge persistent contemporary injustices that “have deep historical roots,” Ricatti urges for critical histories that dislodge white centrality and also engage moral imagination and “new and different epistemologies and ontologies” (492). The aforementioned studies by Perera and Moreton-Robinson represent precisely such imaginative work. I find the questions that Ricatti reaches for, while also acknowledging the complexity of structural change, both provocative and generative:

For instance, what can different Indigenous ontologies, moral attitudes and political positions offer to the current debate on asylum seekers in Australia? What do asylum seekers who are Indigenous to the land from which they have escaped have to offer to the Australian debate on the dispossession of Indigenous land in Australia, and the colonial responsibility of non-English migrants, including refugees, in such dispossession? Why do these complex perspectives remain marginal in the debate about racism in Australia? What role can transcultural and multidirectional memories play? (492)

The answers to such complex questions require and will continue to stimulate creative, critical, and moral engagements with history that challenge the nature of scholarship itself, as Ricatti suggests.⁸ This essay—about Aus-

⁸ Perera’s exceptional *Australia and the Insular Imagination* is an example of such work, drawing on the scholarship and cultural knowledge of Indigenous peoples in the Pacific

tralia's torture of refugees in the Pacific, published in a collection of writing about U.S. human rights violations in the Caribbean—is one small response to this call for critical, multidirectional, and transcultural examinations of imperialism and abuse.

As a writer, Boochani is self-consciously aware of the possibilities of language to engage such questions both analytically and by pointing to the inexpressible. In *No Friend*, he achieves the latter by inserting dreamlike poetic musings, in italics, at regular intervals throughout starker but still literary prose. Literary language has political and personal potential. Poetry, as Ariel Dorfman writes in *Poems from Guantánamo's* afterword, is a “call to those who breathe the same air to also breathe the same verses, to bridge the gap between bodies and between cultures and between warring parties” (Falkoff 71). In Arabic, poetry has historically been instrumental in nationalist movements “discussing oppression and the rights of Indigenous peoples,” as the translator of *Poems from Guantánamo*, Flagg Miller, highlights—a sentiment that Boochani's translator Tofighian echoes when placing Boochani's writing amongst Kurdish and Persian traditions (Falkoff 8; Tofighian xxiii). Boochani watches and documents the Australian government's crimes. But more than witnessing, he shows the power of creative projects to yoke together diverse elements—decolonial, critical, embodied—as a potent, affecting, and even beautiful response to Australia's violent political discourse. *No Friend* is powerful precisely because it moves beyond testimony and journalistic language to create something non-literal, affecting, and visceral.

Beyond Testimonial Discourse: Analysing Australia's Colonial Heart from its Margins

Constructing a narrative that testifies to suffering is a charged political act for a person seeking asylum. As April Shemak has demonstrated in *Asylum Speakers: Caribbean Refugees and Testimonial Discourse* (2010), testimony can play a pivotal role for those seeking asylum, as it is often the basis on which asylum is granted or denied. She observes that “refugee testimonial discourse functions as a political ritual situated on the periphery of citizenship and

region and Australia, and mapping some of these alternate stories. For example, she highlights the non-verbal gestures of hospitality displayed by Nauruans on the arrival of the refugees from the Tampa, and Australian Indigenous writer Tony Birch's work on the ethics of hospitality as an assertion of Indigenous sovereignty (62).

serves as a precursor to political membership; asylum processes require that refugees testify to their experiences of persecution in their native lands” (17). Boochani’s first and most fundamental challenge to the Australian government’s logic is to resist the urge to testify in this most obvious sense, that is, by divulging within the text his reasons for fleeing Iran and thereby implicitly—literarily—pleading his case.

Instead of Iran, Boochani’s text begins in Indonesia, where he boards the boat to Australia. The first four chapters feature the boat in which he travels, a vessel isolated and vilified in Australian law; the “people smugglers” on whom both left- and right-wing Australian politicians have declared war (ABC News); and the journey by sea that obsesses Australian media and politics to such an extent that asylum seekers arriving by boat are singled out legally above all other modes of transport.⁹ These symbols are central to Australian political discourse yet, as realities, remain shrouded in mystery and cloaked by rhetoric. While Boochani alludes to the persecution he faced as a Kurd in Iran, the “*occupation that has devastated an ancient culture*,” these passages are often vague, poetical, and nostalgic, conjuring Kurdish folkloric tropes such as Jezhwan, a woman riding a mare with hair “the colour of wine,” rather than directly critiquing the Iranian government or explaining what he suffered at their hands (71; 286, italics in original). Boochani’s most sustained and precise critiques are of the Australian government’s regime on Manus Island; its buildings, officers, systems, language, and protocol, as I will continue to outline, are described in meticulous detail.

By withholding aspects of his testimony, Boochani draws metatextual attention to the politics of the reader-writer relationship. Omitting the specific details and events that led to him fleeing Iran, that is, the aspect of his story fundamental to his legal claim, Boochani refuses to allow the reader to become the judge of his case.¹⁰ Doing so draws attention to the power imbalance inherent in the narrative’s construction and in the reader-writer relationship, when that reader is an Australian citizen and the writer is a refugee poised on “the periphery of citizenship” (Shemak 17). *No Friends*

⁹ Justine Poon’s scholarship, along with the not-for-profit fact-checking website Asylum Insight, offers illuminating outlines of the development of Australia’s boat arrival-oriented immigration policies.

¹⁰ Reports demonstrate that asylum claims have been rejected on far lesser information and culturally irrelevant or inappropriate lines of questioning, such as whether persecuted gay asylum seekers frequent gay bars or Mardi Gras, or like Madonna (Burton-Bradley).

withholding captures the spirit of resistance often displayed by significant minority writing. Where “only the powerful center can mistake its specificity for universality,” writes Doris Sommer, “‘marginal’ or ‘minority’ texts draw boundaries around that arrogant space” through what they choose to keep opaque (9). If Australian readers feel entitled to know everything about Boochani’s story, but are denied access, this “slap of refused intimacy” may provoke them to analyse the invasive surveillance and exposure that asylum seekers constantly suffer, and perhaps even to question the expectation that an asylum seeker must prove their need for safety in this way (ix). The narrative thus maintains a broader exploration of the unethical demands on refugees and how they are represented in Australia, taking readers beyond Boochani’s own personal case.

Boochani uses his precarious position on the edge of citizenship and political membership—refugees are a group that cannot vote against the political parties who vilify them—to fearlessly place Nauru and Manus within their geography, history, and relationship to Australia. Encountering the shocking reality of these places, many horrified Australian opponents of the regime may insist, like Judith Reem, the former teacher on Nauru, that “we’re a different country, this is not who we are” (“Nauru”). Boochani, however, is paradoxically liberated from a similar investment in nation-state identity, forced to flee one state and refused entry on the threshold of another. From this precarious, marginalised position he sees clearly that “what is relegated to the margins is often, as we know from deconstruction, right at the centre of thought itself” (Ahmed 4).

The text thus creates its own rules, in defiance of the Australian government’s language and logic. The very conceptual basis of the Pacific Solution’s offshore camps is that they are not in Australia; the law has even managed the surreal excision of Australian territory in order to deem it “non-Australia” for asylum claims (Baldacchino 61). However, observing buildings erected by the Australian government on Manus Island and now rotting, decaying and forgotten in the tropical heat, Boochani writes: “This space is part of Australia’s legacy and a central feature of its history—this place is Australia itself—this right here is Australia” (*No Friend* 158). Boochani directly confronts this absurd legal game with his decisive statement that this colonised, denuded part of PNG jungle “is Australia itself” (158).

Similarly, he renames what the Australian government calls its “Manus Island Regional Processing Centre,” replacing the euphemism with “Manus



Fig. 3: A still from *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time*, the 2017 film by Boochani and Arash Kamali Sarvestani, shot in secret on Manus Island using a mobile phone

Prison,” featured in the book’s subtitle. Such renaming, Tofighian argues, is a powerful intellectual move: “Conceptually, he owns the prison” (xxvii). Even renaming that is itself a product of incarceration comes to be, in Boochani’s hands, a deliberate literary decision. The book’s “Disclaimer” explains that distinct individuals have been amalgamated into allegorical characters in order to protect the identities of vulnerable people who are still suffering and waiting for claims to be processed (xxxvi). The result—characters with names like The Insomniac, The Prophet, The Cow, The Blue Eyed Boy—adds to the mythical, even parable-like tone of the book, reminding the reader that *No Friend* is literature, not journalism.¹¹ Boochani has deliberately chosen to draw on artistic modes of engagement to challenge and expose the Australian government’s bureaucratic and legal language and its absurdity, even as it claims to be rational and commonsensical.

In various creative projects, Boochani subverts some of these methods used for domination and control. The Australian government continuously watches and documents refugees. Boochani’s creative work responds: refugees are watching and documenting the crimes of the Australian govern-

¹¹ Boochani is known by other asylum seekers on Manus as “The Reporter” (Zable, “Journalist in Exile”).

ment, too. In *No Friend* he describes adjusting to the initial humiliations of arriving on Manus, such as strip-searches, and realising, “The toilets also have CCTV cameras. It’s really hard to relieve yourself when there’s a camera staring down at you [. . .] a few sets of eyes belonging to unfamiliar people monitoring you [. . .] laughing at you and discussing your sexual organs” (84). His observations recall the sexual humiliation and other forms of degradation and violence that were exposed through photographs of U.S. prisoners in the War on Terror; in this context, Butler notes the use of cameras by the U.S. military in maintaining “representational regimes” through which war operates and rationalizes itself (29).

In response, Boochani powerfully reworks the trope of constant surveillance in his film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (2017), a collaboration with Holland-based Iranian filmmaker Arash Kamali Sarvestani and shot in secret (in conditions of physical danger) on a mobile phone. Boochani disrupts his position as object of the prison’s surveillance culture by taking the camera in his own hand, taking charge of his own voice, amplifying those of the men around him, and challenging how they are represented (McHugh-Dillon). A “politics of representation,” as he has written elsewhere, is crucial to the creation and maintenance of Australia’s offshore detention regime: “What stories are told, how they are told and by whom, has been a determining factor” in the demonization of refugees and the erasure of their creative and critical selves (Galbraith and Boochani).

Drawing on other kinds of stories and knowledge is central to Boochani’s decolonising politics of representation. In particular, *No Friend* engages with the experience of Indigenous Manusians in order to expose Australian coloniality and its damaging myths. Where Australia’s racist propaganda intentionally disseminates a “false image” of local people’s “primitivism, barbarism and cannibalism,” Boochani appears fascinated by their understated resistance—made possible because of, not despite, their non-Western ontologies and moral attitudes (168). He admires how the “Papus,” as the prisoners call local Manusians, exist within the prison and yet do not submit to its logic: they get high on betel nut and attain a “special moment of liberation” instead of surveilling the prisoners (247); they find pleasure, play, and chaos joking and chasing each other in the noon break (169). Importantly, *No Friend* does not frame these behaviours in the same racist terms as Australian propaganda—that is, as naïve, carefree, or essential, and therefore ‘primitive.’ Instead, it contemplates Papus’ ability to forget, even if only momentarily, “the

prison’s rules and militarised logic” (144). For Boochani, finding this mental liberation is the great struggle on Manus, for any individual but notably for someone trying to produce a book like *No Friend*, via a mobile phone. As the men in Manus Prison suffer and internalise its oppressive system, Boochani identifies Papus’ behaviour and attitudes as resistance: “they are indomitable” (144).

While colonialism is often imagined in terms of dichotomies (oppressor/oppressed), Boochani recognises the violent triangulations between “the prisoners, the local people, [and] the Australians,” weaponised by the Australian government as a means of control (145). On Manus, asylum seekers are told by the Australian government that Manusians are violent cannibals; local Manusians, in turn, are warned that asylum seekers are violent terrorists (83; 167). Both myths are propagated by the Australian government to isolate, dominate, and control each group through fear. Crucially, this dynamic replicates the “complex triangulations” fundamental to Australia’s settler-colonial operations at home, between settler-colonisers, Indigenous peoples, and various, usually non-white, Others (Ricatti 479). Fear about asylum seekers and refugees, as Moreton-Robinson observes, is used to justify and consolidate anxious white claims to the Australian continent (154). Unsurprisingly, then, in Manus Prison, where Boochani sees “Australia itself” reproduced, this same racist, colonial dynamic metastasises to simultaneously mask and justify the dispossession of Indigenous people from their sovereign land.

Challenging the divisive violence of these triangulations, *No Friend* finds solace, solidarity, and means of resistance by engaging with Manusian culture and experience. As a refugee Boochani may be Australia’s third ‘Other,’ but as a Kurdish exile, he is also Indigenous to the lands he was forced to flee. Despite the Australian government’s damaging myths, “the local people form alliances with us. This relationship includes some kindness and empathy” (145). In this mutual recognition, Boochani’s observations recall Moazzam Begg’s memoir, *Enemy Combatant*, in which he explores racial hierarchies among U.S.-employed guards. Begg notes the more humane attitudes and unlikely empathy he and some of the soldiers share, especially those who are Black, from U.S. territories in the Caribbean, and mistreated by white soldiers. Begg acknowledges personal familiarity around these guards, having grown up alongside many people of Caribbean descent in Britain (247). However, they share something even deeper: a place in a racialized global

system of inequity. It is no accident, then, that at the prison in Guantánamo Bay “many soldiers saw Haitians as the lowest of all in the Caribbean.” As Begg writes, “In 1991, Camp X-Ray was first used by the U.S. to hold thousands [of Haitians] who had attempted to enter the U.S.” (252).

Similarly, Boochani links Australian guards’ lack of compassion to Australia’s own carceral traditions, militarisation, and—especially important in the context of this essay’s interest in “geopolitical reciprocity” (Perera 8)—its participation in the U.S.-led wars in the Middle East. In contrast to the “indomitable” Papus, the Australian staff in Manus Prison have internalised its logic to the point that one guard openly admits he cannot feel empathy while watching a young man bleed from his own slit wrists (143). Although horrified by this guard’s incapacity for empathy, Boochani is unsurprised: “What can you expect from a man who has spent his whole life immersed in the violence of a prison?” (143). Many of the Manus Prison guards have worked professionally in Australian prisons, Boochani writes, or “for years in Afghanistan and Iraq [. . .] waging wars on the other side of the world. They have killed humans,” as part of their job (142-3). Boochani’s oppositional philosophy is clear: in one of its poetic interludes, the text meditates during the boat journey that all deaths are futile—“*Death is death / Plain and simple*” (75; italics in original). Later, contemplating the ex-military personnel trained to kill, who now work as Manus prison guards, the text echoes the idea: “A killer is a killer [. . .] plain and simple” (143). *No Friend* consistently exposes the link between these modes of imperial, militarised violence, whether in PNG, Iraq, a mainland Australian prison, or the U.S. prison in Cuba known as Gitmo. The system’s cruelty is clear: an inability to see that a human is a human, plain and simple.

“A Piece of Meat with a Mind”: *No Friend but the Mountains*’ Embodied Critical Resistance

Asylum seekers on Manus, meanwhile, are pushed to the brink of their own values through bodily suffering: “There are so many times the prisoner is forced to straddle the border between human and animal” (232).¹² For this reason, I want to emphasise how Boochani embodies his critical work. The text does not seek to transcend the bodily experience; instead, it examines the daily sufferings and humiliations of the body—disgusting and broken toilets, starvation, strip searches, self-harm, sunburn, heat, mosquitoes, un-

treated medical conditions and injuries, ill-fitting clothes, blunt razors—and exposes their integral part in the system’s design. Suffering bodily, each prisoner becomes trapped in his own mind: “The prisoner is a piece of meat with a mind that is always moving between the darkest, dullest and most worn-out scenes” (131). By recognising the torturous feedback loop between mind and body, *No Friend* actually refuses the Cartesian mind/body separation that the system feeds. When refugees are humiliated, denigrated, punished, and reduced physically—when they reach the point that they feel that their physical suffering is all they are, driven mad by bodily needs—prison logic tells them that *is* all they are, and pushes them to conclude that therefore they are not fully human. I argue that the suffering and humiliation depicted by Boochani assert rather than degrade, as the system intends, the humanity of those on Manus.

In the prison, a body’s physical needs become torture when regulated by bureaucratic logic. *No Friend’s* frequent comparison to Kafka becomes apparent in the scenes that depict the endless queues, frustrations, and absurdities of eating or accessing medical attention.¹³ Breakfast becomes “a twisted game” in which officers check names off a list and direct near-starving prisoners to “a vast array of empty trays and chefs fitted out like professionals,” where they are told, “Unfortunately breakfast has run out” and, “Unfortunately, we have been ordered to stand in these positions for another hour. I apologise, we are fulfilling the duty assigned to us. We have no idea” (204). Similar pantomime occurs at the International Health and Medical Service (IHMS), where smiling men and women in white administer water, paracetamol, and contemptuous glances for any ailment, including serious heart trouble (303).

For Boochani, the real motivations of this system are “simple”: “IHMS makes the patients addicted to itself; it pulls them in” and encourages an “extreme form of dependence” (309, 304). He depicts this dependency, “running through the blood of the prisoners—dependency is now a vital part of their biology” (309). But addiction to this system and its internalisation is

¹² The eco-critical aspects of *No Friend*—the ways the text counters these artificial and violent distinctions between nature and prison, between humans, plants, and animals—deserve their own study.

¹³ Newspaper reviews of the book cite Kafka as a major influence (Zable, “Australia’s Barbaric Policy”; CG).

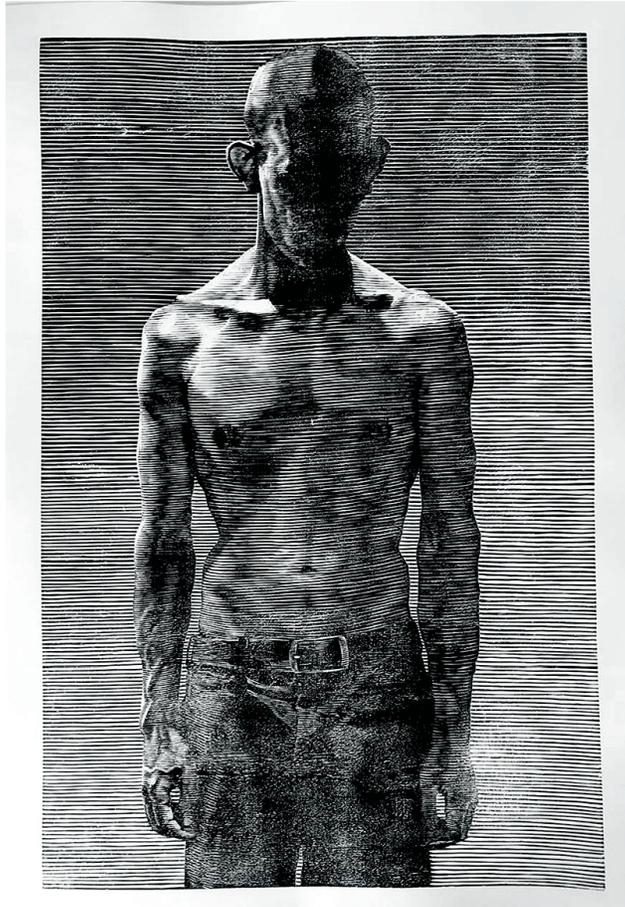


Fig. 4: Sam Harrison. “[REDACTED] had informed staff that he will not eat or drink anything until he gets to Australia.” From *All We Can’t See: Illustrating the Nauru Files*, 2019

also a torturous mental game. Rules and patterns govern every aspect of life on Manus and yet, as Boochani explains, attempting to make sense of them constantly leads to dead ends. He and other prisoners become obsessed with these perplexing, meticulous, but utterly senseless patterns: “Every prisoner is convinced that they or their group are *the* critical theorists of the systemic foundation, the chief analysts of the system’s architecture” (208-9; italics in original).

No Friend warns against the limits of analysing the system—this, itself, can turn you mad. Because the patterns change with no warning, and no staff member can be held accountable or provide any answers, the prisoners are driven crazy by futile, desperate questions: “You bastard, what is the philosophy behind these rules and regulations? Why, according to what logic, did

you create these rules and regulations? Who are you?” (209). From a writer who has dedicated so much to understanding the critical, political, and philosophical logic of Manus Prison, this is a self-aware meta-commentary on *No Friend* itself. It reminds the reader that while critical analysis is crucial, it must maintain a balance with embodied experience. Importantly, beyond analysis, the work explores how physical experiences of suffering can be used to understand Manus Prison logic, and to resist it.

Boochani explicitly puts his body on the line—embodying his decolonial resistance—by refusing to take part in the system’s health service. In agony from toothache, he rejects the IHMS in favour of traditional Manus dental surgery: several Papus help to hold him down and insert a red-hot wire into his cavity to kill off all the tooth’s nerves. Though he “stop[s] breathing [. . .] it is good”—the pain, he writes, “blows my mind” (308). This choice of expression is significant; in this pain Boochani’s decolonial philosophy and his bodily experience are detonated, blown together, beyond words. With a comforting hand, the Papu administering the wire transmits, non-verbally, the compassion and acknowledgement of this human body that is absent in the many empty words of the prison’s Australian staff. “If I had confronted the IHMS system,” Boochani writes, “my soul would have been engulfed in thousands of IHMS letters, reports and forms [. . .] then annihilated” (308).

Boochani illustrates both the literal and poetic meaning of annihilation in Manus Prison. One of the text’s most haunting passages describes the toilets, the site which the government-issued blue-handled razors turn into “a festival of blood, a festival of the dead” (317). Self-harm has become, in this repulsive place, “a kind of cultural practice” (317). Boochani’s strange language paints the fervour and chaos that blossom with this nightly ritual, where the suicide attempts of young men are simultaneously mundane, horrifying, and euphoric. Blood, he writes, “is an amazing element of nature: warm, crimson, and with a scent that induces horror. It’s the colour of death. A wondrous craving for blood-spill, a wondrous yearning for self-harm; that’s all there is to the tale” (318). Self-harm inspires horror in the surrounding prisoners, but also respect and a surreal attraction: “The scene is a mirror that reflects the prisoners, and they gaze into it” (317). In contrast to the regulated systematization symbolised by the razor—a mundane item for which prisoners queue for hours in the hot sun—blood liberates something organic and wild, captured in Boochani’s eerie, trance-like poeticism. If dependency to the sys-

tem killing them is “running through the blood of the prisoners,” here it is unleashed, terrifyingly, free (309).

Falkoff notes that the U.S. Army refers to self-harm at Gitmo as “manipulative self-injurious behavior” and successful suicide attempts as “asymmetric warfare” (2). In Australia, politicians have similarly referred to self-harm by asylum seekers as “moral blackmail” (Broom). Boochani responds to these linguistic cruelties and indifference through the poetry of his text. Perhaps this is what he means when he writes, “the realities of this place can be better exposed through the language of art and literature” (360). Where the dry language of reporting exists in a realm closer to bureaucracy, this literary language refuses to mimic the cold distancing that dehumanises refugees in government policy and rhetoric. For one Chilean survivor of Pinochet’s secret police, Dorfman notes, recalling poetry during torture served as a way to distinguish herself from her tormentors, to remind herself she was more than “a piece of meat” (Falkoff 69). Boochani’s text holds this tension between bodily suffering and beauty. Poetry here gets up close to the body, evoking a surreal atmosphere and a logic that is born from a place where “the dreadful circumstances of life” drive prisoners to end life itself (317). The affecting, metaphorical language probes a fundamental question that throbs throughout *No Friend*: how to live freely in your body in a system designed to control and crush it.

Destruction is not an abstract fear for prisoners on Manus. Boochani’s friends have died in Manus Prison, for reasons that include medical neglect: Reza Barati, “The Gentle Giant,” was bashed to death by guards during the 2014 riots; Hamid Khazaei, “The Smiling Youth,” died from a treatable tropical infection, caught in the IHMS vortex (Robertson). The dangerous, humiliating degradation of body and mind in *No Friend* reminds the reader that its author, too, continues to suffer on Manus; it reminds the reader of a person’s finiteness. Urgently conveying the grotesque, visceral torture of mind and body is *No Friend*’s achievement. Through poetical and visceral language, Boochani engages literature to foment a more feeling, more imaginative engagement with politics, history, and human life itself.

Conclusion: Creative Futures

What is the power, then, of a creative work like *No Friend but the Mountains* to impact the future of “Australia’s Guantánamo”? It is difficult to decisively

draw conclusions about an issue that remains ongoing and unresolved. Although Manus Prison was deemed illegal by the PNG government in 2016 and closed in 2017, hundreds of men remain on the island, forcibly moved to other camps and unable to leave. “At the time of printing,” as the book’s concluding note states, “Behrouz Boochani remains on Manus. He does not know what will happen to him next” (357). Consequently, it is important not to overstate the “prison break,” to borrow Butler’s term, enacted by *No Friend*, when its author continues to live, suffer, and age in the prison of Australia’s detention regime.

At the same time, since the publication of *No Friend* at the end of July 2018, this work has received unprecedented attention. It has carved out a certain future for itself within Australian literature alone; in early 2019, Boochani won Australia’s highest-paying literary prize and made international headlines in doing so, but was unable to attend the award ceremony (Dunne). Boochani’s apparently impossible creative output continues to redefine how Australians, if not their legal system, imagine refugees and the limits of what can be, and is, done to them—and by them. Who thought a feature film could be produced on a mobile phone from a remote Pacific prison, a novelistic memoir written on WhatsApp? What else will Manus teach us about what is possible?

This essay is just one contribution near the start of what is sure to be a deep and broad engagement with Boochani’s important work—analysis the author explicitly invites. “This place [Manus] really needs a lot of intellectual work,” he tells Tofighian in *No Friend’s* preface. “It requires a team to produce research that is rigorous and academic [. . .] Universities need to get involved” (xv). As they do, transcultural perspectives will continue to be essential. This essay is a response to a call felt from across the oceans to imagine how one prison in the Pacific, and another in the Caribbean, are not insulated or isolated from one another but related, as imperial sites of suffering, abuse, and silencing. In the face of this silencing, language, analysis, and poetry are potent. While Boochani remains exiled on the peripheries of the Australian nation, his collaborations with Tofighian and other intellectuals, academics, and artists in Australia paradoxically bring his image, his words, and his protest right into the heart of the Australian nation itself.

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ON THE “PHOBIA OF HOPE” AND EVERYTHING AFTER*

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Abstract

This essay considers how memory and witnessing inform notions of possible futures related to the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay. It discusses the structural heft of the state and its globally embedded military intelligence apparatus, then moves on to examine conceptualizations of hope and futures via both the case of former detainee Omar Khadr and art created by prisoners. In addition, it analyzes testimonies from the citizen-driven North Carolina Commission of Inquiry on Torture and the content of U.S. Department of Defense contracts. Memories of past use foreshadow the possible future of newly funded U.S. military detention camps in its Guantánamo Bay naval base.

Keywords: rendition, truth commission, militarization, Guantánamo Bay, phobia of hope

Resumen

Este ensayo considera como la memoria y el testimonio informan nociones de futuros posibles relacionados a la base naval estadounidense en la Bahía de Guantánamo. Discute el peso estructural del estado y su aparato de inteligencia militar, el cual está integrada a escala mundial. Luego se examinan conceptualizaciones de la esperanza y el futuro mediante el caso del Omar Khadr, quien fue encarcelado en la base, junto a una mirada al arte creado por los presos. También se considera algunos testimonios que formaron parte de la Comisión sobre la Tortura creada por ciudadanos de Carolina del Norte y el contenido de varios contratos del Departamento de Defensa del EE. UU. Las memorias del pasado prefiguran un posible futuro en cual el ejército estadounidense nuevamente financia campamentos de detención en su base de Guantánamo.

Palabras clave: rendición, Comisión de la Verdad, militarización, Bahía de Guantánamo, fobia de la esperanza

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*Nothing brings me back from my faraway
to my palm tree: not peace and not war . . .
What will I do? What
will I do without exile, and a long night
that stares at the water?*
—Mahmoud Darwish

Even in projects deeply concerned with baring/bearing truths that have been obscured, some materials are necessarily cut away. There are brackets to delimit and a frame to organize some sense of the whole, but here's the reality: Guantánamo Bay lies within frames that have been deliberately cracked open and wedged apart.¹ "It" carries meanings both inside and outside the frames of border, legality, morality, religion, ethics, and politics. Guantánamo as a named place exceeds and spills over its borders and nomenclature and leaves tracks and traces that we should be reading, but the name and all its weight have fossilized into a tired signifier. "It" is increasingly difficult to see and hear as urgent, or even real.

The thread of the story line gets lost, time and again. "Weren't most of those prisoners released?" "Didn't Obama close Guantánamo?" "Weren't they all terrorists, anyway?" Those of us working on issues related to Guantánamo hear these questions on repeat. But Guantánamo is a representative space filled with and connected to human beings and our earth: past, present, and future refugees, the forty remaining Global War on Terror prisoners, third-country national workers, military personnel, and all the rest of us who are implicated and bound up in the vast system that sustains the base. This includes the military-industrial complex, but also the less visible militarism so broadly and deeply embedded in U.S. culture. Guantánamo is invoked as a facile bipartisan threat wielded against political opponents, and as a ready solution to the question of what to do with refugees, immigrants, dictators, terrorists, freedom fighters, journalists, and activists on the left and on the right. The military prison has become a casual proposal for dispensing with one's enemies. So has torture.

In the generative theory Daniel Rothberg proposed in his 2009 work, he conceived of memory as "multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotia-

¹ See Allen Feldman, *Archives of the Insensible: Of War, Photopolitics, and Dead Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 41 and note 22.

tion, cross-referencing, and borrowing: as productive and not privative.”² In this essay, I am inspired by Rothberg’s concept as I consider how memory and witnessing (the performance of memory) inform notions of possible futures related to the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo. I will first emphasize the structural heft of the state and its globally embedded military and intelligence apparatus. In the second section, I draw attention to conceptions of hope and futures through both the case of former detainee Omar Khadr, and the images contained within prisoner art. The third section brings testimonies from the citizen-driven North Carolina Commission of Inquiry on Torture (NCCIT) to bear on the post-9/11 rendition, detainment, and torture of prisoners. In the fourth section, I outline DoD contract awards that signal a willful amnesia about prior uses of the base at Guantánamo, as memories of past use foreshadow the future of newly funded U.S. military detention camps at Guantánamo that are under construction for predicted mass migration events in the Caribbean. In the conclusion, I return to the importance of memory and witnessing.

Lethality

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) is the largest employer not only in the country but in the world, and it maintains a presence on all continents. The DoD claims “lethality” as the first and foremost of three strategic goals on its new defense.gov website. The fiscal year 2019 defense budget of \$700 billion is the largest military budget in the planet’s history. The U.S. military leaves a spectacular environmental footprint, as the DoD carries the unhappy distinction of being the world’s largest polluter. Each of us should be aware (and afraid) because it is grimly telling that at this critical planetary juncture, massive capital is directed toward aggressive securitization and explicitly away from sustainable futures for all. The ultra-wealthy of the world may buy themselves and their loved ones a relatively bubbled space in New Zealand and the services of mercenary security forces, but this indicates informed awareness that they too will experience dystopic futures. And the U.S. military presence permeates Latin America and the Caribbean; in fact, there are seventy-six military bases in

² Daniel Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

the region.³ Historically, the U.S. has forged alliances with (and outright installed) dictators or strongmen amenable to its interests, but in the case of Cuba, the U.S. has used the sheer power imbalance between the countries in order to occupy the largest harbor on the south side of Cuba against the will of the government and the people of the island nation, especially those in the Guantánamo region.⁴

This crop, this frame, this border, this piece of writing remains open to cultivate future conversations with what lies outside this iteration and its limits. The sparseness of the telling highlights absence and draws attention to insider/outsider figurations and invisibilities. Those who care about the implications of accelerating militarism in the service of accelerating capitalism must find ways to recover their senses and become clairvoyant and clairaudient. We must see and hear what is not readily apparent and also that which is so present and terrifying that we reflexively squeeze tight our eyes and cover our ears. The militarized camps of the world are signposts, and Guantánamo serves as a key model, determinant, and policy indicator.

One can sketch lines to suggest what might fill the gaps and point toward wholeness or gestalt, but trauma will always leave the telling or testimony incomplete. The sight lines of prisoners and other witnesses carry the pen, but the sympathetic imagination of researchers informed by the combinatory efforts of reading, listening and piecing swaths of testimony fill some of the gaps. It is important to remember what Kristeva and Lacan have to tell us about trauma and witnessing, something Elaine Miller captures eloquently:

The point is *not* to remember the past trauma as exactly as possible: such “documentation” is a priori false, it transforms the trauma into a neutral, objective fact, whereas the essence of the trauma is precisely that it is too horrible to be remembered, to be integrated into our

³ Raúl Capote Fernández, “U.S. Military Presence in Latin America and the Caribbean,” *Granma* August 15, 2018. <http://en.granma.cu/mundo/2018-08-15/us-military-presence-in-latin-america-the-caribbean>

⁴ It is important to note the complexity of the Cuban relationship to the base. Thousands of *guantanamo*s worked there with the blessing of the Castro government, through the early 1960s and thereafter. The Cuban workers were gradually replaced with Filipino and Jamaican third-country nationals; the last Cubans retired in 2012. Meanwhile, the base has provided political ballast for Raúl Castro. See Jana Lipman’s *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History Between Empire and Revolution* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

symbolic universe. All we have to do is mark repeatedly the trauma as such, in its very “impossibility,” in its non-integrated horror, by means of some “empty” symbolic gesture.⁵

This is where public testimony, witnessing, and the power of remembering through connective narratives become so powerful, as we will see as this essay unfolds. Stories carry enormous truths. If Guantánamo exceeds its borders, so too do the stories that emerge from and about its critical space. And the anticipatory familiars found in these interlocking stories provide cautionary signposts for the future. There are patterns and stages of violence and attendant theoretical frameworks that speak to and chart the violence humans do to one another. In these patterns, one can readily identify the excuses that are offered as justification for violence toward the other. We should not compare sufferings. Rothberg argues explicitly against creating this kind of competition, but we would do well to compare historical trajectories and outcomes through ethical witnessing, listening, and remembering with the future in mind.

Zizek—so often the erratic contrarian—was sober and on point when he wrote of the event and the disproportionate response that followed (here, the event is the traumatic day that became 9/11): “[I]t’s not just that the new symbolic order is all of a sudden fully here—there was nothing, and moments later it is all here—but that there is nothing and all of a sudden, it is as if the symbolic order was always—already here, as if there was never a time without it.”⁶ We are asked to call many of these wretchedly reimagined impossibilities “new” or “un-American” practices, though we can clearly spot the familiar vestiges of this or that old—and often ongoing—crime. This is true of the concentration camps of Tornillo in Texas and Homestead in Florida, warehousing children; the prosecution of *No Más Muertes* volunteers for the crime of leaving water for migrants traversing the Sonoran desert; and the cruel policies of familial separation. Crimes against humanity are not new, but the ordering structures are flush with actors emboldened and empowered by the Trump Administration.

⁵ Elaine P. Miller, *Head Cases: Julia Kristeva on Philosophy and Art in Depressed Times* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 48.

⁶ Slavoj Zizek, *The Event: A Philosophical Journey Through a Concept* (Brooklyn: Melville Press, 2014) 135.

The U.S. naval base at Guantánamo remains a key site in this symbolic order structured by the U.S. in the twenty-first century, and to me it is important to return to history to think about the freight of it, and its imprints, which drop so hard into place that they shake and shock many not out of but into compliance. From former U.S. vice president Dick Cheney: “[W]e will have to work through, sort of, the dark side.” From former U.S. president Obama: “[L]ook, we tortured some folks.” And from Trump: “We are going to have to do things that are unthinkable, almost.” In a chapter for a recent volume on Guantánamo, I examined how the U.S. government’s use of the Caribbean, particularly Cuba, shaped narratives that drove, and continue to drive, its imperial ambitions.⁷ In another project, I connect the traumatic event that we call 9/11 with the symbolic order of the twenty-first century and the co-constitution, exchange, and consumption of uni-formed body of the idealized Christian nationalist soldier against the racialized Muslim body, the two silhouetted and exchanged as after-images to enact and populate narratives that fuel both foreign and domestic policies related to war, immigration, securitization, and carceral practices.

So much of this work has been about the peeling away of layers that obscure and conceal. Broad strokes that redact, tapes that disappear, and histories that are vaulted. There were dozens of different languages spoken by prisoners at Guantánamo. Prisoners’ names were obscured through the messiness of transliteration. The names of guards, interrogators, and medics were disappeared behind tape and numbers, and even traded for the names of characters drawn from Shakespearean plays.⁸ But of the dozens of languages to parse, none is more intentionally impenetrable and shifting for outsiders than the language of the military and intelligence services and the defense industry. Just as names of individuals are occluded, names of operations are changed frequently. Defense contracts over \$7 million dollars are posted at the end of the day of award, but the language of the contracts is

⁷ Diana Murtaugh Coleman, “The Amen Temple of Empire,” in *Guantánamo and American Empire: The Humanities Respond*, edited by Don E. Walicek and Jessica Adams (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) 39–66.

⁸ U.S. military medics and guards at Guantánamo covered the names on their uniforms to preserve their anonymity. Sometimes they simply used serial numbers or blacked them out with tape, but Navy medics often substituted pseudonyms. For a period of time in 2013, Navy medics used the names of characters drawn from Shakespearean plays. <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/guantanamo/article2271266.html>

difficult for those outside the defense industry to understand. These are immersed in the shadowy world of defense contracting and the frequent use of subcontractors. Consider the security state and knowledge-of-us economies of the twenty-first century: industries of surveillance, data scraping of social media accounts, trackers in our phones and computers, the commercialization of data points about us for profit, and for far more nefarious purposes, too, like drone surveillance technology that tracks human migration or locates human targets to murder. These are *de facto* phenomena that make claims to be omniscient, but are anything but transparent.

As technologies developed for more benign purposes are appropriated for military intelligence gathering, they are increasingly turned toward civilian populations. Drone technologies and satellites are now used to track and map human migrations and to track movements near borders—not to aid those seeking shelter, but to take a defensive and carceral posture against bodies in motion. And documents recently leaked by someone in U.S. Homeland Security show intelligence gathering and tracking by both U.S. and Mexican officials directed against immigrants’ advocates and representatives. The database has stored information about journalists, activists, attorneys, and social media influencers who have been covering and supporting the migrant caravan. Alerts were electronically attached to passports, in some cases without the individual’s knowledge.⁹ These leaks draw on memory and can be considered a form of witnessing and testimony, while the aggressive prosecution of whistleblowers is meant to create a chilling effect.

The goal of the lethality in the Department of Defense’s Mission Statement is not ephemeral. Lethality means effective killing. It means the efficient murder of human beings. Lethality is not limited to bullets or bombs. It includes policies that result in death. Policies that frame climate change as a threat multiplier. The prosecution of whistleblowers is meant to stem leaks that expose a truth that acknowledges the consequences of inhumane policies and practices.

⁹ Tom Jones, Mari Payton, and Bill Feather, “Source: Leaked Documents Show the U.S. Government Tracking Journalists and Immigration Advocates Through a Secret Database,” NBC San Diego, March 6, 2019. <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/Source-Leaked-Documents-Show-the-US-Government-Tracking-Journalists-and-Advocates-Through-a-Secret-Database-506783231.html>

Futures

When I traveled to Havana in June 2018 for a conference that brought me geographically closer than I have ever been to the prison that I have spent the past ten years researching, conceptualizing, and writing about, I wanted to think about futures. The futures of the prisoners after release, the futures of those who remain, and the future use of the base and the re-animation of refugee concentration camps at Guantánamo Bay likely to happen in the next decade. Thinking about these various futures demanded consideration of how the past has informed ongoing demands for accountability and efforts for repair.

International organizations like Amnesty International, Reprieve, and Cage Prisoners work at the institutional level to support both the prisoners still held on the base and those who have been released. Reprieve developed the “Life After Guantánamo” project. When I met with Katie Taylor at the Reprieve headquarters in London in June of 2014, she described the “Life After Guantánamo” effort as a multi-faceted and individualized program that addressed past trauma to help former prisoners move forward. Part of her work was to identify and arrange the services that individual former prisoners required. In addition, individual citizens create their own mechanisms of support and resistance. I met Val in London at the weekly Close Guantánamo actions held across from the House of Parliament, and at monthly actions at the U.S. Embassy and at Marble Arch. Val described herself as having been fairly apolitical but tending toward the conservative in her views for much of her life. That changed when Omar Khadr’s case began to be discussed in UK papers and news programs. His story struck her core and shifted her sensibilities. It changed her, she told me, and it woke her up politically. Omar was a Canadian child whose father brought him to Afghanistan. He was severely wounded in Afghanistan in 2002, taken to Guantánamo as a teenager, interrogated, and tortured. Val began writing to Omar when he was a young prisoner. She carefully preserved copies of the many letters they exchanged and kept them in a three ring binder. She continued to support him via correspondence and to draw attention to his case throughout his imprisonment and after his transfer to a Canadian prison.

Omar spent ten years imprisoned at Guantánamo, from age fifteen to age twenty-five. In 2012, he accepted a plea deal that allowed his transfer to a Canadian prison. The plea deal offered the only possibility for Omar’s transfer out of the prison. Omar was eventually released and awarded a \$10.5

million settlement from the Canadian government because of the abuse he suffered while imprisoned by the U.S. military at Guantánamo Bay, but the award precipitated a lawsuit by Tabitha Speer, the widow of Sgt. Chris Speer, a U.S. special forces soldier killed in the attack on the house where Omar and his family were staying.¹⁰ Omar, shot three times in the back by U.S. forces, barely survived transport to the base. Everyone else in the house was either killed in the initial attack or killed once the Special Forces entered the home. There is no proof that Omar threw the grenade that killed Chris Speer, other than his confession as part of a plea deal in the now discredited Military Commissions. The Canadian courts ruled that Omar was abused at Guantánamo and that his legal and human rights were violated.

The lawsuit is significant. If the Canadian courts recognize the \$134 million judgment Tabitha Speer was awarded in the United States, Omar’s own settlement is at risk. This settlement is intended to allow him to rebuild his life in Canada, and to have some financial security going forward. The funds are reparations intended to ensure him a future. The charged press articles that focus on Speer as the victim and Omar as a terrorist from a family of terrorists further damage his ability to have any semblance of a normal future, and the threat of continuing lawsuits and the process of defending himself against circumstances that were beyond his control constitute re-traumatization for Omar.

Val also downloaded and printed prisoner art from Guantánamo that was available on the internet and sold it at various actions to support The London Guantánamo Campaign’s work on behalf of the prisoners. The art that she sold to benefit Guantánamo No More was reproduced with standard color on medium grade paper at a print shop in her neighborhood outside of London. I bought a number of the pieces and hung them up in my room in the rented flat still in the matte plastic page protectors. I mused about the lack of readability of those images. Considering the early paintings of the much-touted prisoner art classes, I was struck by the absence of movement and action, though they demonstrated skill and indicated that some instruction had taken place. Many of the works were very skillful, and yet I found them mundane and unsettling. While these were men who were surviving incredibly painful and challenging circumstances, their paintings did not seem to reflect anything of those experiences.

¹⁰ <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/u-s-plaintiffs-fire-back-at-khadr-defence-over-damages-award-enforcement-2>



Fig. 1: Author photo, Guantánamo Prisoner Art, June 5, 2014, Marble Arch, London

When I traveled to meet with graduate students in the MA program at Brighton University in 2014—master’s students participating in a unit about the “ethics of representation” connected with an installation from the Guantánamo Public Memory Project—they and their advisors also noted this disturbing void of emotion. We wondered together if the prisoners had been medicated, shut down, or repressed by the rules of the project. Perhaps only an acceptable sample of what had been produced was being made public. What might have been suppressed? I thought at the time, and I think today, that there was a “phobia of hope” expressed in those early paintings. I did not have this language at the time, but I had the sensation.

I would not hear the phrase used until Katherine Porterfield invoked it in 2017 at the NCCIT hearings. This sense was further confirmed by very different paintings and works of art by former Guantánamo prisoners displayed at John Jay College in 2018. There are clear distinctions between that earlier art and the more recent productions in terms of their affect. The military

chose to make the first set public, while the latter collections was organized by lawyers—but does the curation fully explain the differences between collections?

Rebecca Adelman researches topics of militarism and visual culture, and as part of her work, she visited the military prison at Guantánamo for a day in 2012. In describing her experience, she is honest about her rough expectations and her realizations concerning the potential for overreach and appropriation. Adelman rightly cautions against assuming knowledge of the interiority of prisoners. She invokes the term “fictive intimacy” to chasten those who would appropriate the emotional selves of the prisoners to claim the territory of moral goodness for themselves. It is the absencing of prisoner anger and the abstraction of the interiority of the prisoners that interests Adelman.¹¹ In the humanities, we rely on sympathetic imagination; our work would be sorry and depleted without that sensitivity. And the cautions are important. Both of these things are true. Full stop. Many works of fiction and non-fiction draw on sympathetic imagination to more fully witness the truths of others, but this practice requires the establishment and maintenance of ethical boundaries.

Truth Be Told

The southern state of North Carolina is just a short flight away from Washington, D.C.; from Camp Peary, the CIA training facility often referred to as the Farm; and from Fort Bragg, one of the largest military bases by population (50,000 troops) in the world. Fort Bragg is named after a Confederate general; many Confederate symbols permeate the area and are part of pilgrimages to commemorate Confederate history.¹² Interestingly, this history is more linked with the history of Latin America than many of these “heritage tourists” may realize. Toward the end of the U.S. Civil War and in the period following it, refusing to fully concede to the end of slavery, numbers of former Confederates hoping to preserve the “peculiar institution” looked

¹¹ Rebecca A. Adelman, “Fictive Intimacies of Detention: Affect, Imagination, and Anger in Art from Guantánamo Bay,” *Cultural Studies* 32:1, 86.

¹² The Farm is also referred to by the acronym, AFETA, which stands for Armed Forces Experimental Training Activity. Established in 1918, Fort Bragg is named after Confederate General Braxton Bragg, a slaveowner who operated a sugar plantation in Louisiana.

to settle in new territories where it was still legal. They moved to locations in Latin America and the Caribbean, mostly Brazil and Cuba, where they became known as *confederados*. During this period, Cuba was of course under Spanish control, with three main factions vying to advance their respective agendas. One group was advocating for full independence from Spain and the U.S., another was pushing for Cuba to become recognized an official province of Spain, while the third desired annexation to the United States. It was this third group that had a natural affinity with the *confederados*. This historical intersection points to a much longer history of interconnections between the Caribbean and the U.S. South, one that has largely disappeared in popular narratives of Confederate “heritage”—and one that is present as well in the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo and its penumbra of global effects. Among the latter is the CIA’s use of an airport in North as a base for rendition flights, one chosen precisely because it is in a remote area with proximity to military and intelligence sites.

The global became local when I moved to Greensboro in the summer of 2017. I learned that the North Carolina Commission of Inquiry on Torture (NCCIT) was busy preparing for public hearings just an hour away in Raleigh, the state capital. There is something inherently hopeful in the idea of bringing far-flung collectives of human memory to bear on the present and on potential futures, and the NCCIT does just that. It is a citizen-driven platform for witnessing and accountability that began as a grassroots effort to expose how an airport in the community was tied to the kidnapping, rendition, detainment, and torture of foreign nationals, including individuals who were imprisoned at Guantánamo. It defines itself as “a citizen-led truth seeking commission to understand North Carolina’s role in the post-9/11 Rendition, Detention, and Interrogation Program” (often abbreviated as RDI) from 2001 to 2006; it is concerned with determining “its resulting obligations under international treaties and domestic law.”¹³ The commission includes professors of law, national security, public health, human rights, criminal justice, government, political theology and ethics, and public policy, as well as psychologists and members of the clergy. Many of them have served in government or the U.S. military, or held leadership positions in human rights organizations. The Commission of Inquiry on Torture held in

¹³ North Carolina Commission of Inquiry on Torture, *Public Hearings* (Olney, MD: Xian Studios, 2017) 1-2.

Raleigh is a first for the U.S.—a large-scale, citizen-led formal inquiry into a local community’s role in kidnapping and renditioning men and children across the world to be imprisoned and tortured after 9/11.¹⁴

Using local airports and civilian planes and pilots to carry out clandestine missions is not a new practice. The CIA has been using civilian aircraft to cloak missions since the 1940s. (Fort Bragg is also home to the Joint Special Operations Taskforce, which the NCCIT believes may have been working with Centurion Aviation, another actor in the rendition flights.)¹⁵ Trevor Paglen sketches a brief history in his 2006 book *Torture Taxi*, in which he details how a “brand-new Gulfstream V jet,” tail number N379P, owned by the CIA subcontractor Premier, became known as “the Guantánamo Bay Express” because it landed there so often.¹⁶ After the scrutiny of the Church Pikes Hearings, the CIA shifted from operating their own shadow airlines to contracting with shell companies. One of these companies, Aero Technologies, was set up in Johnston County, North Carolina, in a small town called Smithfield. The planes flew to the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo from the public airport there, and from a larger airstrip in nearby Kinston.

The commission that assembled to hear testimony on these and related issues was made up of experts from a broad swath of fields, and they spent years working together researching and examining evidence. The goal of the commission was three-fold: to publicly air the findings, to give public space to witnesses, and to find mechanisms for potential prosecution and redress. Juan Méndez, the former UN special rapporteur on torture—and a survivor of torture himself—opened the meeting. He and other witnesses drew on historical commitments to human rights to frame their statements. One clear emphasis was that accountability and redress matters. The witnesses included former interrogators and intelligence officers, and a military defense attorney, Sterling Thomas, whom I had met previously in Chicago at an Amnesty International Conference, and who does not hesitate to call the Military Commissions at Guantánamo kangaroo courts. In Chicago and in North Carolina, Thomas spoke in uniform, an act he draws attention to, thus emphasizing the reasoning he brings to this decision, should anyone have

¹⁴ The public hearings referred to here were held on November 30 and December 1, 2017.

¹⁵ See <http://www.nccit.org/background>.

¹⁶ Trevor Paglen and A.C. Thompson, *Torture Taxi: On the Trail of the CIA Rendition Flights*, 54.

any doubts. Throughout, commission members maintained a clear emphasis on identifying what justice might look like to the former prisoners. Those participating in the commission and those testifying on behalf of the prisoners were clearly motivated by hope for remedies and different futures, but hope in this context emerged as a complex concept.

Among the experts who appeared at the hearings was Dr. Katherine Porterfield, a clinician at Bellevue in New York City who has worked with survivors of war trauma, torture, refugee trauma and other forms of persecution for two decades. She has treated patients from Kosovo, Haiti, Egypt, Colombia, the former Soviet Union, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bangladesh and Sierra Leone. She was the first psychologist given permission to travel to Guantánamo and examine Omar Khadr. Her experience in traumatology prepared her to work with victims of torture, but she found that there were unique features in those patients who had been subjected to the U.S. RDI program. For these men and boys, Porterfield said, “the transport during the RDI program was integral to the totality of the torture experience and was highly traumatizing as well.”

Torture is not an ambiguous concept. It has been studied and defined by international bodies. The UN’s Commission on Torture describes torture as “a deliberate and systematic dismantling of a person’s identity and humanity through physical or psychological pain and suffering.”¹⁷ In the neurobiology of human beings who have been subjected to pain and torture, there is what Porterfield calls a cascade of responses. This cascade is involuntary, neurophysiological. Human bodies subjected to torture react to protect our very being, releasing neurochemicals, neuro-endocrines that are responsible for the flight or fight response. These responses can save our lives or the lives of others when we flee from danger or manifest strength to lift a heavy beam off a neighbor’s leg, but when they are purposely triggered again and again, absent the ability to change the conditions that are being experienced or inflicted, these chemicals can cause significant damage and negatively impact one’s well-being, sometimes permanently. The result may be, quite literally, a future in which one is afraid of hope itself.

In 1999, the World Health Organization considered broadening the definition of well-being to read: “Health is a dynamic state of complete physical,

¹⁷ UN Shadow Report on Article 14: The Right to Rehabilitation, Prepared for the United States’ Review Before the United Nations Committee Against Torture – November 2014.

mental, spiritual and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”¹⁸ This definition would have emphasized a holistically defined wellness through interrelated dimensions. Though the new definition was not formally integrated into the WHO’s official language, the term derived from the four dimensions has valence.¹⁹ Programs like Reprieve’s “Life After Guantánamo” work to address this holistic constellation of concerns, and so does the program at Bellevue. Porterfield says the symptoms caused by the RDI program “should be called biopsychosocialspiritual because so much of the torture program used on these individuals was organized around an attack on faith-based practices and beliefs.”²⁰ Among the topics Porterfield described was a symptomology I had never encountered in broad range of literature I have read about torture survivors:

[An area . . .] of severe impairment that I witnessed was what I came to call a “phobia of hope.” This condition was pointed out to me by an attorney who stated of her client, “He is afraid of hope.” Once I began these evaluations, I began to conceptualize of this as not simply a fear of hope—“I don’t want to let myself hope because I know I will be disappointed” or even hopelessness—“I don’t believe my situation will improve”—but an actual **PHYSIOLOGICAL** reaction to being drawn towards conversations or thoughts about the future. A phobia—that is, a physical reaction of terror and desperate fleeing away from the feared stimulus—but in reaction to being asked to think of the future.

She continued,

I came to see this so much that I believe it clinically originated in the specific experience of the torturing interrogation—as I came to conceptualize it, the repeated experiences of questioning, coupled with bodily pain and annihilation of the sense of self-autonomy combined to make these men terrified of conversations about their future because it brought them back to previous states of dependence on someone with

¹⁸ See Saad et al., 2.

¹⁹ The term “biopsychosocial” broadened the understanding of the needs being addressed in patients to the physical, psychological and social realms. The spiritual was bracketed, but the opening created by the tripartite term naturally begged the consideration of other dimensions, whether formally adopted or not.

²⁰ Katherine Porterfield testimony, NCCIT Hearings, 2–3.

total bodily control over them. This has led some individuals to literally plead to not be made to think about the future. This was some of the most disturbing clinical symptomatology I had ever witnessed.

Mohamedou Ould Slahi also participated in the NCCIT hearings in North Carolina, albeit remotely. A citizen of Mauritania, he was rendered via an Aero contractor plane operated by a North Carolinian pilot. He was imprisoned at Guantánamo from 2002 to October 2016, some fourteen years. The map below, “The Global ‘Spider’s Web’ of Extraordinary Rendition,” is documents actual kidnappings and traces life changing trajectories for Slahi and others. During the course of his testimony, I watched his emotional and physical affect change. It was as if the testimony had exhausted and aged him over the course of less than an hour. Slahi spoke of being renditioned to Jordan from his home country. When he was told his rendition was happening at the request of the U.S., he asked that he be taken to the United States to face his accusers, to speak to the U.S. president, to be able to clear things up, because he hadn’t done anything wrong. He was told, “They don’t want you there. You are being sent to Jordan.”²¹



Fig. 2: “The Global ‘Spider’s Web’ of Extraordinary Rendition.” Map provided by Dick Marty, Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Council of Europe.

²¹ Mohamadu Slahi remote testimony, NCCIT Hearings, November 30, 2017. <http://www.nccit.org/witnesstestimony/#slahi>

He then read from his memoir, *Guantánamo Diary*. Mohamedou has a charming demeanor that nonetheless betrays pain and nervousness.²² He smiles and laughs, but it is a painful smile and a distancing laugh. He is bald with a shadow of facial hair. His glasses with their large black rectangular frames are almost something to protect him from us, from the page, from the pain of recounting his experiences through this public testimony. He is reading his own words, but he does not want to relive the trauma of those words. When he begins to read, his face grows tense and a light sheen of perspiration appears. His expression is pained, and he appears to grow older before us. His eyes are obscured by a glare on his large glasses, but we can read the rest of his expression. His voice catches, but also becomes lower and flatter.

He stops reading and says, “Let’s stop there.” His voice catches. He is emotional. He sniffs and wipes his eyes. He places his glasses on his forehead, almost as if to flip a switch to remind himself that he is in his own home. He closes his eyes and listens to the response through the large headset, with the attached microphone positioned near his mouth. “When I was kidnapped from my country,” he says, “it was by a Jordanian crew. They had a different SOP [Standard Operating Procedure] . . . The American teams and their SOP was different, much harsher.” He says, “My family, like me, are simple people. We grew up in a military dictatorship. We knew that the government is ‘always right.’ They can do whatever they want. Your security apparatus and the unholy marriage with dictators has to be broken. It has to stop.”

Near the end of his testimony, when asked what he might want in terms of justice, Slahi answered, “Why does your president love Muslim dictators so much? Just answer this question and I will go away.” He continued, “The U.S can keep their apology, but I want them to stop restricting my movements. I need medical treatment. I am still in prison. I cannot travel. I am not free.” Here Slahi is referencing his past, ruminating about his present, but alluding to a possible future. This has taken work. And talking about the future causes him distress. Slahi invoked the idea of hope as he spoke about traveling for medical care. But the subject also threw him; his speech in response to a question about what justice looked like to him was fragmented and emotional. His composure fractured as he struggled to formulate an answer adequate to his experience of sequent renditions, detentions,

²² Mohamedou Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*, edited by Larry Siems (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2015).

and interrogations. When asked about his medical issues, he hesitates, as if overwhelmed at the task of listing the problems. “I cannot sleep. I am in terrible pain.” He explains that they removed his gallbladder in Guantánamo. He has sciatica, exacerbated by the years of torture. He has hypertension. He has night terrors—he imagines himself back in his cell. He is on many medications. Other things, he cannot (is not allowed to) talk about, as conditions still imposed by the U.S. (terms of release). (This may also be on the advice of his legal team, should he be able to one day seek reparations.)

Khadija Anna Pighizzini, the wife of former detainee Abou Elkassim Britel, also gave testimony remotely from Bergamo, Italy, via Skype. Kassim, as Khadija calls him, is an Italian citizen. After serial detainments and torture at the hands of Pakistani and U.S. officials in 2001 and 2002, he was extraordinarily renditioned to Morocco—meaning that he was kidnapped by the CIA and secretly transferred via without due process in one of the Aero planes flown by an Aero contractor. Kassim was held in Morocco for four months before being released. He was re-arrested when he tried to return to Italy, where he had lived since age twelve. The Moroccan authorities then imprisoned him for an additional nine years for “subversive association.” Following these nine years of imprisonment, Kassim was pardoned, but the pardon cannot lift the weight and injury of a decade of torture, separation, and imprisonment. Khadija points toward Kassim’s difficulty with the past, the present, and the future.

Khadija described her husband as unable to testify. He has a difficult time encountering the past, the present, and the future. His experiences in Pakistan and Morocco shaped his future. Khadija explains that his name and his honor have been permanently impugned. The decade taken from him is an irreversible theft. He has a hard time leaving the house. His wife has learned to ask if it is an okay time to discuss things. Kassim spends his energy containing himself. His life, we hear, is about controlling his anger. Sometimes, even when they manage to go to do something innocuous like visit the market, Kassim finds himself stressed, and they must leave in the midst of shopping. He sleeps. He sleeps a lot. He has, his wife says, internalized the evil of what was done to him in the course of his sequent renditions and imprisonments. He carries within himself experiences that were forcibly introduced into his consciousness and being. He is not the same person he once was. He does not want to relive the memories of his past, has difficulties navigating his present day, and is often unable to think about the future.

The stories of the rendition, detention, and torture repeated by many participants and witnesses and directly experienced by Mohamedou and Kassim describe horrific policy and practice—and without remedies, these practices stand to be repeated. In the case of Slahi and others imprisoned at Guantánamo, there are also clear implications for the future use of Guantánamo Bay as an ongoing space for extralegal activities.

Contracting Futures

Half the population of the Caribbean lives within 1.5 km of the shoreline.²³ While the entirety of the Caribbean will face escalating weather events related to global warming, those living close to the coast are frequently more severely impacted. Though actions in the Caribbean play no major part in contributing to climate change at the global level, its inhabitants, especially the poor, many of whom live in low-lying areas, will suffer disproportionately from its effects. As much as the Trump government refuses to acknowledge the realities of climate change, its policies reflect a clear awareness of the threat. The U.S. naval base at Guantánamo does not only hold bodies transferred into U.S. custody in the wake of 9/11; it is also being revitalized as a holding center for new “mass migration events.”²⁴ On February 22, 2018, RQ Construction, LLC, of Carlsbad, California, won a \$23 to 27 million contract to build a “Contingency Mass Migration Complex” at Guantánamo that could hold up to 30,000 migrants:

The project includes site shaping for tents, concrete pads for camp headquarters, galleys and dumpsters, perimeter and service roads, and a mass notification system. Supporting facilities include utility systems (electrical, water, and sanitary sewer), exterior lighting, information systems to include fiber optic cable service, utility infrastructure expansion, vehicle parking area, storm drainage, and removal of two family housing trailer units.²⁵

²³ N. Stern, ed., *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review*, 77. Quoted in Oli Brown, *Migration and Climate Change*, Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 31.

²⁴ Robert N. Hein and Jason Tama, “Keep the U.S. Naval Station at Gitmo Open,” *Brookings Institute*, March 25, 2015. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/keep-the-u-s-naval-station-at-gitmo-open/>

²⁵ “Release No: CR-035-18 Contracts, U.S. Department of Defense, February 22, 2018. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Contracts/Contract-View/Article/1448206/>

Another massive DoD contract for infrastructure at Guantánamo was awarded on September 24, 2018. The combined contract award is worth \$240 million, and will be split among six construction firms, including RQ Construction, with work to be completed over the next five years. The language in the contract is vague. For many years, any DoD contracts that totaled over \$5 million were reported daily; however, the threshold has recently risen to apply only to contracts over \$7 million. Sometimes it's possible to find information through websites of the companies that have been awarded contracts, but defense contractors often have nested layers of subcontractors. These contracts signal the maintenance and expansion of the base infrastructure, but also the addition of infrastructure for future detentions. Concrete pads have been poured for a massive tent city. The frames are in place to hold tens of thousands of migrants and troops to guard them. But as policies at Guantánamo have demonstrated, frames can be broken. The oppositional corners and blinds that we write ourselves and others into are of nothing more than human construction, and as such they can be undone. The mass migration camps planned, funded, and framed for those fleeing conditions related to climate change and militarism can be disassembled. Present accountability for past violations may point us toward measurably better futures.

Coda

There are openings. There are futures. And futures may be penciled and sketched, suggestive or even grimly predictive, but they are not yet written. Katherine Porterfield says that there are three things that survivors of torture need to heal:

1. Control: “to be brought back to a position of safety”
2. Narrative: “to experience a time and space that allows (the survivor) the kind of narrative they want to create, to be able to tell (their) story in the way (they) want to”
3. Community: “so important for people who have been wrenched from their community...a reengagement with others in some sort of supportive environment.”²⁶

²⁶ Katherine Porterfield, “Trauma and the Refugee Patient: Barriers and Strategies for Care,” Public Health Live University of Albany. Minute 32. <https://vimeo.com/179940423>. Porterfield also addressed the three things that sufferers of torture need to heal in the question and answer portion of the NCCIT Hearings.

When asking questions about what form justice might take, the NCCIT commissioners maintained a fidelity to recognizing the agency and will of the survivors. Porterfield’s testimony and comments during the question-and-answer portion of the NCCIT hearings drew on her experiences working with survivors from different geographies and situations, and she explicitly used historical memory and ethical imperatives to discuss potential futures. The NCCIT is a model that provides flexible components for all three of the requisites Porterfield outlined, offering contour without restrictions that would force a unitary approach on all survivors. I would argue in closing that those three things are important for the world at large. Spaces for truth-telling and listening that emphasize accountability and correctives will move the world as a whole toward humane futures.

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GUANTÁNAMO AND THE LIMITS OF CIRCUM-CARIBBEAN EMANCIPATION*

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Abstract

This essay traces the relationship between the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and monuments to the Confederacy erected during the Lost Cause era in the U.S. South. It argues that it is not a coincidence that the latter were created during the same historical moment in which the United States forcibly acquired the land on which the base sits. Examining intertwined histories of antebellum nostalgia and imperialist aggression, it imagines what may become of this place in the future.

Keywords: Confederate monuments, memory and nostalgia, speech acts, Guantánamo as public monument, Hurricane María

Resumen

Este ensayo rastrea las relaciones entre la base naval estadounidense en la Bahía de Guantánamo, Cuba y los monumentos en honor a la Confederación construidos durante la época de “La causa perdida” en el Sur de los Estados Unidos. Argumenta que no es una casualidad que los monumentos fueron creados durante la misma época histórica que el terreno cubano de la base naval fue adquirido a la fuerza por el gobierno estadounidense. Al examinar las historias entrelazadas de la nostalgia del periodo antebellum y la agresión imperialista, se imagina lo que este lugar podría convertirse en el futuro.

Palabras clave: monumentos de la Confederación, memoria y nostalgia, actos de habla, Guantánamo como monumento público, huracán María

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I.

This is about remembering things that never existed. This is about the denial of obvious things. I'll confess that this is, more than anything, about the reality I wake up to every day—the encompassing state of cognitive dissonance in which Donald J. Trump is the president of the United States. And—at the same time—the post-disaster landscape of Puerto Rico, a society being slowly crushed in the vice of global capitalism, where people array themselves like human shields, keeping that vice from closing by sheer force of will.

These realities, both of them, have emerged from the pulsing organs still pumping blood through the old, old body of the circum-Atlantic world. Trump, with his strange naiveté—as if nothing existed before he knew of it—is, in effect, a time traveler, a colonizer in the old mode, “discovering” things that others have known about for millennia. Yet from where he stands, “the leader of the free world,” he is able to pronounce them new, *now* known, because he has just realized they are there. This is a pure id, with no consciousness of past or future yet able to send shock waves across them both.

Of course, Trump has no need to understand all this. As Ta-Nehisi Coates writes, white freedom is “a freedom without responsibility without hard memory; the freedom of John C. Calhoun, not the freedom of Harriet Tubman, which calls you to risk your own; not the freedom of Nat Turner, which calls you to give even more, but a conqueror’s freedom, freedom of the strong build on antipathy or indifference to the weak” (Coates).

As we approach what may be the end of the United States’ experiment in democracy—an experiment perpetually haunted by the ghosts of those it has forcibly turned into property, into capitalism’s raw materials—it’s no accident that the government has taken on bizarre proportions and what was fake, made for TV, has merged seamlessly with physical reality. The simulacral reality that plays out every day is directly related to how that key determinant of the nation’s soul, or maybe we should say character—the practice of chattel slavery—was simultaneously remembered and forgotten after the Civil War. This process is manifest in important ways in the Confederate monuments littering the landscape of the South, which have become focal points of white nationalist protest. And it is at the geographic edges of U.S. empire, in Puerto Rico after María, for example, and at the

U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay—that we can clearly see things that were forcibly suppressed in the service of creating a reality that was always impossible, a reality based on the idea that some people were people, and other people were things.¹

It has been a reality based on the power of rhetoric to conceal certain issues while elevating others—a determined, willful separation of the signifier from the signified. In his famous work “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin noted that in the diffusion of a physical object (a piece of artwork, an actor’s body) by mechanical means—the remaking of that object by technology into an object that can be disseminated widely—the original becomes different. It becomes visible only through the lens of the copy. Via the medium of film, an actor is alienated—transformed, in fact, into a body for sale. “The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera,” Benjamin writes,

is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one’s own image in the mirror. But now the reflected image has become separable, transportable. And where is it transported? Before the public. Never for a moment does the actor cease to be conscious of this fact. While facing the camera he knows that ultimately he will face the public, the consumers who constitute the market. This market, where he offers not only his labor but his whole self, his heart and soul, is beyond his reach. During the shooting he has as little contact with it as any article made in a factory. (11)

It is the nature of capitalism, wedded to technologies of entertainment and leisure, to turn bodies into objects. More specifically, to turn bodies into objects for sale. Capitalism, founded on the bodies of enslaved people, knows no bounds, and can now transform any body, given the right circumstances, into a salable commodity. Echoing Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism—a process by which human labor and even human beings vanish—Benjamin’s actor becomes “an article made in a factory.”

But the original has not ceased to exist—the body of the actor, even transported to a thousand places at once, functions as a vanishing point that

¹ Anthropologist Michael Taussig argued, “Europe and its colonies, white and colored, reflect back stunning fantasies of each other’s underworlds from conquest and slavery onward” (6).

shapes everything around it. In this way the simulacrum becomes an echo chamber, haunted by the voices of the disappeared. Trump is a person whose ultimate goal is to sell himself and what Benjamin might grudgingly agree to call his “aura”—in a world whose reference points are increasingly mediatized, virtual, the body is, perhaps, the ultimate commodity. As Benjamin writes at the end of his essay, “Fascism sees its salvation in giving [the] masses not their right, but a chance to express themselves.... The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life” (19). (Not coincidentally, Benjamin died—was killed by Soviet agents, or committed suicide—trying to escape the Nazis.) This process has occurred perhaps more pervasively than Benjamin imagined. Neal Gabler suggested in 1998 (and even that seems a lifetime ago),

after decades of public-relations contrivances and media hype, and after decades more of steady pounding by an array of social forces that have alerted each of us personally to the power of performance, life has *become* art, so that the two are now indistinguishable from each other. Or, to rework an aphorism of the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, the world doesn't exist to end in a book; when life is a medium, books and every other imaginative form exist to end in a world. (11)

Although this critique seems unnecessarily hierarchical, it points to the way in which some of our reference points have become just as likely immaterial fictions as actual things and events, blurring, as Gabler notes, the boundaries between the two. In a class I teach at the University of Puerto Rico, my students repeatedly use examples from movies and Netflix series to illustrate their points, as if these invented stories and characters were as real as their own lives. And at this point, who is to say they're not? Perhaps from the vantage point of mediatized regions of the Caribbean, it becomes especially clear that what is called daily life in the United States closely resembles performance art.

Baudrillard described the process whereby, in a mediatized society, things and their meaning can act independently of each other, culminating in a world in which signs relate to other signs. This process has, in fact, so thoroughly penetrated the fabric of mediatized society that figureheads become evanescent, bombastic copies of copies—but the vaporous presence of flickering, capricious shadows is clearly as consequential as any material object, and sometimes even more powerful.

Despite many attempts over the course of human existence, people cannot die virtually. Therefore the body remains irreducibly at the center of the simulacrum. This is a key fact shaping the relationship between reality and representation, and the impact of “alternative facts.” At the highest levels of the U.S. government, the question now is: How far can the signifier be separated from the signified? How many real bodies of the disenfranchised and marginalized can they maim and kill before they are stopped? In other words, how fungible is truth?

Linguist J. L. Austin developed the concept of the speech act, the idea of “doing things with words”—of speech as having material power. In Austin’s theory, an authority must be appropriately vested with power in order to make things true just by saying them. *By the authority vested in me, I now pronounce you*—but it’s clear that the ability to exercise the speech act ultimately has nothing to do with the appropriateness of the power and everything to do with the extent of it. The Spanish conquistadors exercised their ability to invest speech with the force of action when they mumbled the document known as the *Requerimiento* from the decks of their ships through beards grown thick through weeks at sea, looking out across an island in the Caribbean they had recently come across. This document, emanating from the Spanish monarchs of the early sixteenth century, declared that their proxies were now the masters of all they surveyed. *And it was so*. The speech act, clearly, relies on the ability of the system in which it is embedded to enforce it. *You’ll do it because I said so*. And sometimes it relies on the willingness of the listener to believe. But how far—truly—does the power of the speech act extend? This is what people in the United States, and the world, are in the midst of finding out. And the answer is of the utmost practical importance. Fascism, resurgent in the West, careening around in the White House, depends upon the ability to enforce a distinction between signifier and signified. *Who you gonna believe—me or your lying eyes?*

II.

There used to be a statue of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee at the foot of St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans. Lee stood atop a fluted column, more than twice as tall as life, arms crossed over his chest and one foot boldly stepping forth over the edge of the sixty-foot drop. Like an enormous Napoleon, gazing out across territory both men had lost, Napoleon after

his defeat by the Haitian army led by Toussaint and then Dessalines that had broken the chains of slavery and risen up to take on the full force of the French; Lee, after fighting for the same thing—the preservation of the system of chattel slavery and all the advantages it brought to wealthy whites.

“Lee Circle,” as it came to be called, is a small but significant vortex spinning off into the complex poetry of the city’s palimpsestic landscape. St. Charles Avenue—the iconic streetcars clang their way up and down the neutral ground, shaded by live oaks—leads from the Central Business District, once home to the largest slave market in the South (Johnson), and ending near the former plantation land that’s now the site of Tulane University, my alma mater, where walking out the door of the building that housed the English Department, you’d pass a thick stand of sugarcane preserved by some unsung landscape architect, a testament to the irreducible history of this piece of earth that alludes to its connections to the larger circum-Caribbean region.

Lee’s statue was placed atop the fluted column in 1884, nineteen years after the Civil War ended, fourteen years before the Spanish-American War began, and seventeen years before the U.S. Senate voted to affirm the Platt Amendment, which gave the United States effective dominion over the vast majority of Guantánamo Bay. These temporal relationships point to a clear line connecting memorials to “Confederate freedom, the freedom of John C. Calhoun” and the events of Charlottesville and other white supremacist demonstrations with (the spectacles made of, as well as the very fact of) Muslim prisoners at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo, with the spectacle of Donald Trump tossing rolls of “beautiful, soft” paper towels to Puerto Ricans devastated by Hurricane María (CNN).² Among other things, this temporal continuum within the spatial continuum of the circum-Caribbean region illustrates the necessity of spectacles of dehumanization to the dominant concept of freedom in the United States, once chattel slavery set the precedent that—all appearances to the contrary—human beings could be turned into objects to be bought and sold. It points to another, related

² Trump’s trip to Puerto Rico following Hurricane María was marred by the kinds of inappropriate, tone-deaf responses that have characterized his presidency. As a reporter for *Vanity Fair* described the scene, “he spoke to a group of hurricane victims, and then shot rolls of paper towels into the crowd as if wielding a t-shirt cannon at a baseball game. It was, to put it mildly, not the ideal response to a situation in which thousands are without drinking water, food, electricity, and medical help....” (Stefansky).

history, too, the one whereby the rupture between “North” and “South” was healed via shared participation in imperial aggression in the form of the Spanish-American War, which led to the U.S. colonization of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam—and Guantánamo Bay.

Lee’s statue, largely unremarkable to passing whites, a chafing sore to people of color (Landrieu 163–64), was placed at the center of the former Place du Tivoli at a time when the meaning of the Civil War and the Southern defeat was being radically reimaged by white Southerners, including groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy (of which my grandmother was a member). At this point in time—the mid-1880s—memorials to the Civil War evolved in a distinct and highly significant way. At first, such memorials had been mournful. But now they had become aggressively celebratory (Foster 118). In the years leading up to the Spanish-American War, memorials to the Civil War moved from cemeteries to public squares, and they depicted the era of slavery as a time that ended because it was too beautiful to last. As monuments to “the faithful slave” went up across the South, the descendants of enslaved African Americans were being lynched in ever-greater numbers.³ The contradictions inherent in the narrative of the past that whites were calling into being had to be eliminated, terrorized out of existence. As former New Orleans mayor Mitch Landrieu pointed out, “the statues were not honoring history, or heroes...they were created as political weapons” (3). It’s no accident that white supremacists see these statues as key bulwarks of defense against the encroachment of racial equality, for this is exactly what they were intended to be. They “commemorated an old order that never existed in the first place . . . a slave society without the moral impediment of slavery,” in which “. . . slavery’s hidden work” functioned as “a controlling absence” (Savage 130). As Lonnie Bunch III writes, “Perhaps the most unsettling of these statues are those of so-called ‘loyal Negroes’: black mammies and other slaves loyal to the south. Erected in the 1920s . . . these seemingly inclusive monuments were used to defend egregious Jim Crow laws. If African Americans protested these inequalities, defenders needed only to refer to the myth of the loyal Negro to justify their innocence” (Bunch). Such symbols are the product,

³ See Stewart Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882–1930*, especially Ch. 2, “A Portrait of the Lynching Era” (17–54); see also “Lynching in America,” americanlynchingdata.com.

the exemplar, of a kind of terrible nostalgia that defies belief, as I suppose nostalgia often does, because necessary to it is the invisibility of its object. Nostalgia, crucially, takes shape around a vanishing point—the center of the image, to which the eye is drawn, is a nothing. Nostalgia, then, depends upon absence to give shape to everything around it. It's a form of memory that requires that the thing being remembered never happened.

Nostalgia is a word, invented from Greek roots in the seventeenth century, that can be translated as “wounds of returning.” It became, in fact, a medical diagnosis, one from which Northern soldiers were thought to have died in the Civil War (US Sanitary Commission). After the Civil War, it was weaponized in the South in a successful attempt to revalue the meaning of defeat. With the end of the period known as Radical Reconstruction in 1877—the period immediately following the end of the war of “forty acres and a mule,” a time in which formerly enslaved men voted and held office—white Southerners launched a pointed and deliberate retelling of the story of the antebellum era and the causes of the war. This was the work of the “Lost Cause” era—to remake things as they had never been. No longer was the war, or even the plantation era, about slavery; it was a time when there were no “slaves,” only blacks willingly improved by the ministrations of benevolent whites, protected and civilized, taught Christianity and useful trades. Textbooks that even hinted at brutality were banned from schools at every level during the Lost Cause era (Blight 278, 281–82, 284), and the narrative was enforced that the Civil War was fought over the issue of “state’s rights.” (The realities of the slave system and its aftermath have been ‘whitewashed’ in textbooks used in Southern public schools into the twenty-first century.)⁴ Southerners were no longer traitors to their nation but defenders of the Constitution. The Lost Cause narrative meant “refusing to acknowledge even the presence of slavery” (Savage 11) in public monuments to the Civil War. As David Blight writes, the ideology of the Lost Cause was “one of the most highly orchestrated grassroots partisan histories ever conceived” (258). The war over

⁴ As a 2015 article in *The Washington Post* notes, “Five million public school students in Texas will begin using new social studies textbooks this fall based on state academic standards that barely address racial segregation [. . .] [W]hen it comes to the Civil War, children are supposed to learn that the conflict was caused by ‘sectionalism, states’ rights and slavery’—written deliberately in that order to telegraph slavery’s secondary role in driving the conflict, according to some members of the state board of education” (Brown), and almost exactly as prescribed by the UDC around the turn of the twentieth century.

slavery was transformed via an aesthetic project aimed at accomplishing no less than making the depths of terror and cruelty beautiful. Thus when the United Daughters of the Confederacy sponsored essay competitions, they received entries containing paens to the “Old South” and the KKK from Washington State and California (see Blight 290). The nostalgia of the Lost Cause (a violent nostalgia) had become nationalized via dominant popular culture. Scarlett in Hollywood’s version of *Gone with the Wind*, picking the cotton herself, a poor white martyr working to hang on to all she had left, is a technicolor image of Lost Cause revisionism, and plantations on which slavery was a “choice” are its legacy.⁵ In the misty narratives of Lost Cause nostalgia (absorbed into the bloodstream of the nation in, for example, the very first feature-length film ever made, D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*), it was emphatically the best choice.⁶

During this era (and beyond), many Southern whites viewed racial equality as an existential menace, for the end of the Civil War had profoundly challenged what it meant to be white in the United States. What could freedom possibly mean in a world where it had always been defined in the context of slavery? And a corollary question: What could whiteness possibly mean when blackness was no longer fundamentally equated with slavery? (Alternatively, historian Kirk Savage writes, “[W]hat would freedom mean in a society still attached to the very concept of racial difference used to justify slavery?” [4]) Whiteness had always been, as James Baldwin noted, “a lie”—an invention intended to convey power on those who could partake of it, defined against its apparent opposite. The nation was founded upon a contradiction, clear to us in our own time, and probably equally clear to the “Founding Fathers” in theirs, if only they had admitted it—the irony of slaveholders preaching “that all men are endowed by their Creator with

⁵ David Blight writes, “[I]f Lost Cause ideology gained long-term strength from its success in controlling history books, and by banishing slavery from the war’s causation, it drew its staying power from the image of the faithful slave and the overall ideology of white supremacy” (284) to emerge as a “narrative of racial victory” (291).

⁶ TMZ employee Van Lathan responded to Kanye West’s comment about slavery being a “choice”: “While you are making music and being an artist and living the life that you’ve earned by being a genius, the rest of us in society have to deal with these threats to our lives. We have to deal with the marginalization that’s come from the 400 years of slavery that you said for our people was a choice. Frankly, I’m disappointed, I’m appalled, and brother, I am unbelievably hurt by the fact that you have morphed into something to me, that’s not real.”

certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Thus the master-slave dialectic crept around between the lines of the nation’s foundational documents, asserting its dissonance as white masters freed their enslaved children, intimately entwining itself with one of the primary tenets of national (and proto-national) identity: Freedom. So once slavery was outlawed (except, of course, as punishment for a crime)—then what? The ideology of the Lost Cause followed—not only a revisionist history of the Civil War, but a rewriting of the meaning of American freedom that continues to hold sway up to this very moment, accompanied by the violence against black bodies, minds, psyches that enforced it.

In 2017, just over two months after the attack in Charlottesville, Dr. Abel A. Bartley, Chairperson of the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission, spoke out against the relentless reiteration of Lost Cause logic:

The members of the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission would like to register our opposition to the ill-informed proposal to erect a monument in honor of South Carolina’s Civil War-era African American Confederate pensioners. First, we can all agree that the idea of a monument to recognize the significant role African Americans played in the Civil War is a worthwhile pursuit. However, a monument to commemorate the men forced into glory is essentially an attempt to rewrite the history of African American contributions to America’s freedom struggle . . . The suggestion that African American slaves had the ability to choose to volunteer for service in the Confederate cause is preposterous.

It is essential to foreground the fact that ever since the beginning of the fraught American experiment, there have been counternarratives pushing back against racist, imperialist rhetoric and practice (and these counternarratives may be poised to prevail in the U.S. election in 2020—but we cannot assume, we cannot assume—not yet). In the face of the towering projections of white supremacy along Monument Avenue in Richmond, for example—in the face of the statue of Robert E. Lee put up by African American workers who likely had little choice in how they earned their wages—in 1903, Richmond native Maggie Walker, daughter of a woman who had been enslaved, founded and served as president of a Richmond

bank.⁷ She was “the first African American woman to charter a bank in the United States” and became chair of the board of directors “when the bank merged with two other Richmond banks.” She apparently did not speak directly to the issue of the Confederate monuments rising up in Richmond, but spoke in no uncertain terms in the form of her life’s work, not only as a banker but as founder of a newspaper, vice president of the local chapter of the NAACP, and member of the Virginia Interracial Commission (National Park Service), among other works. When her great-great-granddaughter visits her house in Richmond, she can hear Walker speak to her—“Don’t give up, baby. I didn’t do this for no reason.” And now Walker’s own statue, unveiled in Richmond in 2017, stands as a rebuttal in kind to the physical and rhetorical violence of the Lost Cause that remains embodied there in the statues of Confederate soldiers (Remmers).

III.

The Lost Cause’s aggressive rearticulation of the meaning of the Civil War and the era of chattel slavery was organized around making something beautiful out of the most hideous thing imaginable, via the symbols and stories that flowed from the South across the nation as a whole. This campaign to profoundly, retroactively change the meaning of slavery itself coincided with, and was assisted by, acts of imperial aggression that turned the dark contradiction at the nation’s heart once more into a rallying cry for freedom. The post-Civil War reunification of white Northerners and white Southerners drew strength from imperialist forays into the tropics, including Cuba, a site long coveted by Southern slaveholders as a natural outgrowth of the Southern slaveholding landscape. It’s no coincidence that the era in which the vast majority of Confederate monuments were erected is the same one in which the United States forcibly acquired both Puerto Rico and the land on which the naval base at Guantánamo now sits.⁸ As Gaines M. Foster writes,

The rituals of the Confederate celebration [in the Lost Cause] helped heal the wounds of defeat, but the need for northern respect and for a

⁷ See Tina Griego, “Past and Present: The Many-Sided History of the Monument Avenue Debate,” *Richmond Magazine*, July 25, 2015.

⁸ As Karen L. Cox writes, “93% of the monuments erected on the urban landscape were built after 1895” (50).

sense of full participation in the Union persisted. Southern participation in the Spanish-American War and the euphoric patriotism generated by the conflict did much to meet both needs, and a deeper sectional reconciliation followed. Moreover, the war spurred the North to offer symbolic testimony to Confederate heroism and nobility. As a result the white South felt vindicated in the early twentieth century as never before. (145)

More pointedly, “this deepening racialization of American patriotism, the growing alliance between white supremacy and imperialism, had profound consequences for race relations and for the nation’s historical memory” (Blight 352). Once ogled by the likes of Jefferson Davis (and Thomas Jefferson) as a site of expansion for slave territories, Cuba became conceptualized as a slave to be freed. In an image staged by Civil War veteran Fitz Guerin, Northern and Southern soldiers shake hands as they stand before a little white girl—Cuba—who raises her arm joyously, the chain that bound her dangling free.⁹ In this image, enslaved bodies of the antebellum era in the United States are replaced by a white body representing Cuba, which serves as a conduit to national reunion. Empire-building, like the Confederate monuments back home, becomes another a way both to disappear and to extend the oppression of people of color.

By this point in time, “so much had lynching become the hideous underside of black life in America that most blacks could only view the nation’s excursion into imperialism through this violent prism” (Blight 349). One Southern soldier, a veteran of the war in Cuba, wrote home from a hospital in Manila in 1900: “I forgot to tell you about it. The second night I was here, a black negro soldier was put in a cot next to mine. You can imagine how I felt! I took my cot out into the hall and would have carried it to the privy or got away from him. He was moved the next day” (Fuller). This soldier had been raised on a plantation his family still owned near Edgefield, South Carolina, and he had surely had contact with “black” people all his life, possibly intimate contact. The premise of the war, as he seems to have been well aware, was white supremacy, and he refuses to consider the black soldier his equal as he writes to his mother, at home on this same South Carolina plantation. A hundred years later, her letters ended up with

⁹ See Walicek and Adams, 10–11.

her great-granddaughter, also born in this same corner of northwestern South Carolina, who would go on to attend a segregated high school in the late fifties and early sixties, and then the segregated University of South Carolina.¹⁰ A young woman who would become my mother. Who would try to teach me, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world, that the Civil War wasn't fought over slavery, but over state's rights—a classic talking point of the Lost Cause era, arriving intact where we found ourselves, out in Portland, Oregon, over a century later.

The veiled menace that white Southerners intended the Confederate monuments of the Lost Cause era to carry forward was, and remains, “a slap in the face....It's a way of saying that no matter what you do financially, professionally, in your life socially, civically, you may be eye to eye with me, but we have something that's higher than you,” as one African American Richmond resident described it. “This is something that stands above the city and looks down” (Calello). The resistance to this message is circum-Caribbean: the *Jamaica Gleaner* reported, “Caribbean American Congresswoman Yvette D. Clarke has introduced a bill in the United States House of Representatives to remove Confederate statues from military bases. Clarke, the daughter of Jamaican immigrants, said the ‘Honoring Real Patriots Act of 2017’ would require the U.S. Department of Defense to change the name of any military installation or other property under its control currently named for individuals who fought against the United States during the Civil War or supported the Confederacy's war efforts.” The paper noted that other Caribbean-descended politicians also spoke out against the Confederacy in the wake of the events in Charlottesville, among them “New York State Assemblywoman Diana C. Richardson, the daughter of St. Martin and Aruban immigrants [. . .], New York City Councilman Jumaane Williams, the son of Grenadian immigrants [. . .],” and Haitian American New York Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte (*Gleaner*). The worlds of the Charlottesville protests and Confederate memorials in the U.S. more generally are not separate from circum-Caribbean histories of race-based oppression.

It was from Guantánamo Bay that the U.S. launched the invasion of Puerto Rico, which it proceeded to impoverish, carrying out cruel experiments on the limits of peonage and wage slavery. The viral disregard for the bodies of

¹⁰ The University of South Carolina was integrated in September 1963 by Henrie Monteith, Robert Anderson, and James Solomon.

others has resulted in the lack of federal disaster aid to Puerto Rico, where the current figure of deaths after Hurricane María may be “at least 4,645”—up from a previous official estimate by the Puerto Rican government of 64 (Hernández and McGinley), more than double those who died in Hurricane Katrina, and over a thousand more than the number of deaths on 9/11.¹¹ Puerto Ricans emerge briefly in the U.S. national news before being swept away by the next current event.

At the edge of empire, human bodies are cast as incomprehensible objects to be thrown away or left to fend for themselves against insurmountable obstacles, as in Puerto Rico, or objects too dangerous and/or valuable to let go, as in the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo. Nostalgia and aggression have gone hand in hand, overseeing the great plantation that the United States has created and maintained via the progression of chattel slavery (and lynching, racist policing, the war on drugs) and its ongoing imperial control over parts of the Caribbean—the territories it neglects and controls as well as sovereign nations, perhaps most notably Haiti and Cuba.

Imperial logic, like that of the Lost Cause, is the logic of the speech act. *Guantánamo*. The word has gotten jacked by the White House and the U.S. military. And as a result, these days, for many people in the United States and other parts of the world, it means only one thing. Muslim terrorists in orange jumpsuits, the “worst of the worst.” A prison filled with people who aren’t even people.

When you see the base from the Cuban side, you can see clearly what a liminal zone it is. You can see that Guantánamo Bay, and the U.S. prison there, are part of the Cuban landscape. You know, having arrived at this point by traveling through Guantánamo Province itself, that it is contiguous with the Cuban landscape. You know that there are parts of Guantánamo that have nothing to do with prisoners at all. Looking across to where the base sits—there is the littoral that made empires desire it, its location on the Windward Passage, within the Atlantic gyre, the winds and currents connecting it to other parts of the Caribbean, to the U.S. mainland, to Europe, to Africa—and back. The deep, protected bay as a haven for ships across the centuries. It is at the margins of U.S. empire and in its marginal

¹¹ In August 2018, the Puerto Rican government revised its original figure of 64, released in December 2017, to 2,975. See Santiago, Shiochet, and Kravarik, “Puerto Rico’s New Hurricane Maria Death Toll Is 46 Times Higher Than the Government’s Previous Count.”

identity, it is fortified and becomes central. In its secretive, even furtive missions, it serves as a clear warning—do not question the sovereignty of the dominant power. State terror is both necessarily highly visible and completely concealed.¹² Thanks to the perpetual lease that originated with the Platt Amendment, this site is another vanishing point—because it is leased property, neither exactly the United States, nor exactly, in a legal sense, Cuba. This is deliberate: on a technicality, no rules apply. It’s a place that people, and rights, vanish into, with the suspension of habeas corpus—*you shall have the body*—and the limbo of prisoners who have committed no crime. Despite the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Boumediene v. Bush* (2008), in which the majority found that prisoners at Guantánamo are protected by the constitutionally guaranteed right of habeas corpus, prisoners have had little recourse against the U.S.’s ongoing violations of international law. They literally do not have the right to their own bodies. Five men have currently been cleared for release but cannot get out: Ridah Al Yazidi, Muieen Abdal Sattar, Tawfiq Al Bihani, Abdul Latif Nasir, Sufyian Barhoumi.¹³ Again, on a technicality—but a technicality that is intimately connected with the history of “American freedom.” Many of the detainees brought to Guantánamo were purchased by their U.S. captors. They were confined, hooded, in chains. At the detention center, they were even held with shackles manufactured by the same company that manufactured shackles that held enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and other parts of the Americas (Walicek).

This reiteration of the disciplinary technologies of slavery suggests that slavery has not outlived its usefulness to the U.S. body politic. The spectacle of indefinite detention, rather than being hidden as it was in Lost Cause narratives, is now cast as something necessary, very specifically, to “our freedom.” “Guantánamo” is the epicenter of a new carceral order that followed slavery as a mode of discipline of “other” bodies, and minds, a means of policing of the borders between *us* and *them*. It’s a prosthesis of the U.S. body politic—central ideologically, detached geographically, the better to function as the suppressed alter ego of freedom. At the so-called black site at Guantánamo, as at black sites all over the world, unspeakable things are done and no one can be blamed. U.S. ships landed cargoes of Africans here illegally in the nineteenth century and now, consistent with its long-

¹² Thanks to my colleague Michael Cucher for this insight.

¹³ See closeguantanamo.org.

term right to the bodies of others, the U.S. government stores the bodies of those whom it deems irremediably other. Over the course of the nation's history, it's never been a mystery who owns the bodies, and the spectacle of freedom's absence is still apparently necessary to the smooth functioning of government, and even of democracy.

These sites and the lives and struggles that play out within them are testaments to the intertwined history of antebellum nostalgia and imperial aggression—and the fact that the freedoms elevated by western liberalism require restrictions that date back to the very onset of modernity. Colonization and chattel slavery are not history. In the images that emanate from these sites at the edge of U.S. empire, we can see quite clearly that they are now.¹⁴ And what happens at these sites broadcasts at full volume and in living color what has been sacrificed in order to create the purported unity of U.S. nationalism. This apparent unity was always a rhetorical production, heavily reliant on the power of language to create a sense of a common project out of the disparate contradictions upon which it was founded. With the very fact of chattel slavery—amplified by the narratives of the Lost Cause—the signifier came loose from the signified. With Trump, that rhetoric breaks down completely, presenting the question of what, in truth, is left.

IV.

The figure of “the slave”—not a real person, but rather a figment of white imagination—is perhaps the ultimate manifestation of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, an economic relationship into which people have disappeared. U.S. capitalism has an insatiable appetite for bodies, which it transforms into property—a process that is connected to the origins of the nation in the system of chattel slavery.

But white supremacy has become incorporated into the dynamic of commodity fetishism as well, a dehumanizing force that leaves its adherents wandering in a fog of amnesia spawned by the Lost Cause era's attempted erasure of real people from historical narratives and from participation in the body politic. White planters, politicians, lawmakers, religious leaders, teachers, and others justified their brutality through a concerted form of dehumanization that, in the end, dehumanized them as well, along with their virtual children, these angry whites who cling to statues of Confederate

¹⁴ Thanks to my colleague Evelyn Dean-Olmsted for the phrase “edge of empire.”

generals as if they represent a pinnacle of white achievement instead of the insistently false narratives of defeated traitors.

Around 1904, the American novelist Henry James traveled to Richmond, Virginia, and visited that city's enormous statue of Robert E. Lee, which at the time stood alone in a deserted space beyond the city limits (Savage 148–50). As he considered the image of Lee mounted upon his horse, James wrote, “I was tasting, mystically, of the very essence of the old Southern idea—the hugest fallacy,”

as if hovered there to one's backward, one's ranging vision, for which hundreds of thousands of men had ever laid down their lives. I was tasting of the very bitterness of the immense grotesque, defeated project—the project extravagant, fantastic, and today pathetic in its folly, of a vast slave state (as the old term ran) artfully, savingly isolated in the world that was to contain it and trade with it. This was what everything around me meant—that that absurdity had once flourished there, and nothing, immediately, could have been more interesting than the lesson that such may remain for long years, the tell-tale face of things where such absurdities have flourished (371) . . . [T]he historic poverty of Richmond . . . is the poverty that *is*, exactly, historic . . . the condition of having worshipped false gods. As I looked back, before leaving it, at Lee's stranded, bereft image . . . I recognized something more than the melancholy of a lost cause. The whole infelicity speaks of a cause that could never have been gained. (394)

But as time went on, the city filled in around Lee—the planners who had sited the statue proved prescient, as it came to anchor the famous Monument Avenue, a boulevard that would eventually be lined with multiple statues commemorating famous Virginian Civil War veterans. The terrible thing about James's reflections is how wrong he was about what the defeated bitterness of the white South would ultimately mean. Out of this crucible of defeat would arise speech acts: “You just tell them and they believe. They just do” (Silva). But also: “I'm not intimidated by Robert E. Lee's statue. I'm not intimidated by it. It doesn't scare me.”¹⁵

¹⁵ The first quote is from Donald Trump, the second from Sandra Crenshaw, “a former city council member in Dallas,” who believes that taking down the monuments is just another way to whitewash the violence of racism. See Alessandra Maldonado, “How Do Black Conservatives Feel about Confederate Monuments?”

The Lost Cause attempted to make slavery beautiful by wielding nostalgia as a weapon. Now, in our era, national self-destruction can itself serve as an aesthetic pleasure. The media has thrived on Donald Trump. “You helped create this monster,” as Michelle Wolf said at the White House Correspondents’ dinner, “and now you’re profiting off him” (Wolf). Perhaps this symbiotic sickness is coming to a close, but not before it has revealed a fundamental truth about the racist roots of American spectacle.

Confederate monuments such as the statue of Lee in New Orleans, and the statue of Lee in Emancipation Park in Charlottesville, were intended to recall a time that never existed—they were created, in fact, in order to call that time into being, as a *present* moment, as the *future*. But the statue of Robert E. Lee that once stood with all the force of white memory holding him up, gazing north from New Orleans, has been taken down. Once, ironically, characterized as “historic” and therefore immutable, and after a controversy that led to death threats against the contractors who had agreed to the work—finally, in broad daylight, the statue descended once and for all. It has been spirited away to an undisclosed location so that the centrifugal force of its lies may not serve as a shrine to normalized racial intimidation.

Is it, therefore, so hard to believe that one day the neocolonial net that has ensnared Puerto Rico will be cast off, or disintegrate? That one day the U.S. naval base and the prison at Guantánamo—which, after all, have existed for less time than Lee presided over New Orleans—might also one day be a memory?

V.

Donald Trump’s wall has been in the news lately. The U.S. government shut down for 34 days because he and the extreme right wing have been clinging to this symbol of exclusion, and then he went “full autocrat” (Klass 52) and declared a national emergency. “Build that wall” trends on Twitter, and the catchphrase itself sounds not only racist and xenophobic but vaguely sad, lost, an echo of past defeats, a harbinger of future ones. Or maybe that’s just the way I’m hearing it, thinking about the way in which post-post-modern society has shown us how much people want to connect.

Public life is full of symbols. The wall, the Confederate monuments, ISIS—all tools of racial intimidation, intended to clearly signify who is out and who is in. Who is “us” and who is “them.” Behind these symbols lies the

threat of war and the promise of economic profits—weapons in the hands of private citizens or government, at the ready to enforce social and racial divisions.

These symbolic geographies make explicit use of memory—the stories of “illegal immigrants” who have killed “real Americans,” who have brought drugs to poison American citizens. The mothers of victims are in the audience as President Trump declares a national emergency at the nation’s southern border (see Golshan). He invents stories, makes things up—facts, statistics, people—to support his nativist rhetoric. Because things don’t need to actually be seen in order to be believed, within the strange landscape of memory and forgetting and race and trauma that is American history.

Human memory naturally attaches itself to places. It’s most at home there, indeed almost effortlessly adheres to built environments, creating a story that was not there before, a story that has been invented, and yet becomes concretized, not to say “real,” through the mind’s inarguable, ineluctable faculty of merging place with idea.¹⁶ In what sense is the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo also already a monument, though it remains largely invisible to the public? A war memorial, a site of a different public memory, one that is created through the circulation of selective images and myths—a memorial to a shapeless forever war? The Authorization for the Use of Military Force passed by the U.S. Congress on September 18, 2001, gave the executive branch broad powers to use force “in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States.” To prevent *any future acts*? The force that might be brought to bear on such a project is inconceivable.

¹⁶ In *The Art of Memory*, Frances Yates tells the story of a poet in ancient Rome who “chanted a lyric poem in honour of his host” (1) and was then called away; while he was outside in the street, the roof of the hall collapsed, killing everyone inside. The poet was able to identify the victims by repopulating the room, for his memory had attached to the place itself. He would go on to invent a system of memory based on this insight. This story “is told by Cicero in his *De oratore* when he is discussing memory as one of the five parts of rhetoric; the story introduces a brief description of the mnemonic of *places* and *images* (*loci* and *imagines*) which was used by the Roman rhetors” (2)...“The first step was to imprint on the memory a series of *loci* or places....The images by which the speech is to be remembered...are then placed in imagination on the places which have been memorised [sic] in the building...[A]s soon as the memory of the facts requires to be revived, all these places are visited in turn and the various deposits demanded of their custodians” (3).

The stated enemy is “terror.” And let us consider—how it is possible to have a war on terror?

War is terror.

To fight a war is to both sow and reap terror. There is no other kind of war. The rhetoric of hubris defines the American political project, and its imperial project specifically, simultaneously disguising and revealing the violent impulses of the U.S. government, past, present, and “future.” Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again” slogan, simultaneously presuming upon “greatness,” defining it as white, and suggesting a perpetual war, perfectly captures the dynamics that undergird ongoing American imperialism—an imperialism that is, paradoxically, completely evident at the highly restricted, even invisible, U.S. naval base at Guantánamo.

Guantánamo Bay, then, is an emblem of American power, and at the same time a memorial to the entire history of U.S. imperialism. The U.S. government asks, tacitly, that we think of “GITMO” and remember the “greatness” that was part and parcel of an expansive and yet exclusive version of national identity. It asks us not only to remember, but also to perpetuate, this notion of nationalism. It exists not just as a site of convenience, which it is, but as a deadly beacon. A warning. An invisible monument to American power that is one of the most powerful symbols of that power in the world. And if Guantánamo is a public monument—an embodiment and focal point of collective memory—what does that suggest about its particular future?

Guantánamo as memorial links action to the thing remembered. It is not only a memorial to an imperialist past but a site in which there’s an ongoing, active performance of imperialist/hegemonic labors. In a February 2018 interview, NPR “national security correspondent” David Welna reported,

I did a guided military tour...of two of the prisons here. And they were showing off a \$12 million conversion of one of them into a brand new prisoner health clinic and hospital complete with operating rooms and metal rings attached to the floor for shackling patients. And I would also note that the military censored a couple of photos that I took of those metal rings. They’re also building new cement roads around the prison camps. And a big new barracks is in the works to house more than 800 soldiers. And some of this had been planned earlier. But it all suggests that this is no temporary installation here.” (Welna and Garcia-Navarro)

On the side of the United States the idea of shuttering the prison has been fraught, of course. Fidel Castro and others have argued that the U.S.'s presence in Guantánamo Bay is illegal.¹⁷ But the U.S. has bigger guns, which was how they were able to coerce Cubans to sign the Platt Amendment in the first place; and the UN Security Council is dominated by the United States, which, like the other permanent members of this body, “can veto any substantive measure” (Kirgis). If this site is to be transformed it will likely not be because of international pressure, but rather because the U.S. has decided that its base at Guantánamo has become in some way a liability, or a bargaining chip to achieve some strategic goal. As the U.S. trades away its global stature under Trump, whose understanding of world politics is profoundly self-centered, it may be that the U.S.'s claim on this part of Cuba becomes untenable. Then again, if the removal of Confederate statues can be taken as a guide, in certain fundamental ways the tide is turning within the U.S. itself against the notions embodied by the Lost Cause—the supremacy of the “old ways,” racist dominance. “We do indeed live by symbols” (Levinson 112). What’s next depends in part on how useful a walled-off base at Guantánamo remains to the United States as an emblem of power—how useful the detention center remains as a symbol of enduring military prowess and cultural domination. The laws of the United States once protected slavery while preaching freedom. They once protected segregation under the guise of equality. At GITMO, the potential for irony and contradiction within the law is perhaps even more evident, for the point is that it’s just beyond the reach of the law. So what must change, if the prison is to be closed and the base is to be abandoned, are practical considerations as well as rhetorical ones; the crude poetics and the practice of sovereignty both must shift.

Everything is temporary. Is America dying? The base at Guantánamo will be its monument. If the land it occupies is returned to Cuba, as at least one military leader suggested it eventually would be (in the days before Trump),¹⁸ it will be a memorial to imperialist terror—to the document entitled “Humane Treatment of Taliban and al Qaeda Detainees,” signed on

¹⁷ See Castro, *Why the Illegal U.S. Base Should Be Returned to Cuba*.

¹⁸ “It’s probably inevitable that we’ll have to give it back to Cuba, but it would take a lot of diplomatic heavy-lifting,” Ret. Adm. James Stavridis noted in 2015, for the base continues to be “strategic, and highly useful....It’s hard to think of another place with the combination of a deep water port, decent airstrip and a lot of land.” Quoted in Miroff, “Why the U.S. Base at Cuba’s Guantánamo Bay Is Probably Doomed.”

February 7, 2002, by George W. Bush. “I accept the legal conclusion of the Department of Justice and determine that none of the provisions of Geneva apply to our conflict with al Qaeda in Afghanistan or elsewhere throughout the world because, among other reasons, al Qaeda is not a High Contracting Party to Geneva,” he wrote. Because al Qaeda is not a state, and therefore was not eligible to agree to the provisions of the Geneva Convention, Bush argued, the U.S. would be justified in violating the proscription of torture.¹⁹

We cannot know how perceptions of the fenced-off, bifurcated, schizophrenic piece of semi-America at Guantánamo may change. Will it eventually be deemed too painful, too fraught, for memory, like the *Enola Gay*, which dropped the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima, another moment in which Americans changed the meaning of war? As Dean MacCannell writes, as a result of protests from veterans’ groups, today the plane sits at Dulles International, its marker providing no more than “its technical characteristics” (170). Should the physical installations built by the United States at Guantánamo remain, or some of them—the cells for Muslim prisoners echoing the slave cabins at some Southern plantations, the houses of the military officers like the “big houses,” aesthetic monuments to horror? The hospital with its shackles, the devices used to torture prisoners—these physical remnants of inhumanity—should they stay, bulwarks against forgetting? Some day, perhaps the traces of the camps where Haitian men, women, and children were held, intercepted at sea while fleeing Duvalier or the violence spurred by a coup, will be drowned in rising waters, become encrusted with barnacles, and swimmers—with nothing now to fear from the U.S. Navy—will float above them, watching the sea do what it will with the frail, disintegrating evidence of human difference.

¹⁹ Under international law, torture is considered to be one of the most basic violations of human rights. Yet Al Qaeda detainees, the “Torture Memo” states, are “unlawful combatants” beyond the protection of the Geneva Conventions, and therefore “do not qualify as prisoners of war” owed humane treatment. The memo ostensibly renewed U.S. support for the Geneva principles, but its caveat—the repeated phrase “to the extent appropriate and consistent with military necessity”—was a clarion call to begin torture of “unlawful combatants.”

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TRANSLATION _____

BRITISH CARIBBEAN MIGRANTS IN GUANTÁNAMO (1902-1950)

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Translators' Note: *This translation presents excerpts from the book Los anglo-caribeños en Guantánamo (1902-1905) by Jose Sánchez Guerra, which was published in Spanish by the Guantánamo-based press El Mar y la Montaña in 2004. We hope that disseminating key parts of the text in English contributes to broader understanding about migration and its multiple links to both the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay and the social history of eastern Cuba.*

The events described in this work are significant for many reasons. They provide additional context for the interview with Lennox Lambert Farquard that forms part of this volume, also showing that migration is the norm rather than the exception in Caribbean history. In addition, this migration informs the construction of collective memory in several settings, providing a basis for comparisons and understandings of what is acceptable in contemporary societies. As Matthew Casey observes in his book Haitian Migrants in Cuba During the Age of U.S. Occupation (2017), “public figures from across the political spectrum in Cuba, Haiti, and the United States continue to invoke this early twentieth-century migratory movement to make large claims about past history and future expectations” (13).

The Pioneers

The 1879 registry of the church of Santa Catalina contains some of the earliest written evidence that people who were born in the Caribbean's British colonies and other islands of the eastern part of the region lived in the Guantánamo Basin.¹ It confirms the presence of islanders from Jamaica

¹ Census of the town of Guantánamo, 1879. Archive of the Santa Catalina de Riccis Church, Guantánamo, Cuba.

and individuals from the French colony of Martinique and the British colony of New Providence. A woman named Genoveva Presseau (she was born in 1798), a free *parda* and native of Kingston, appears to have been the first to arrive to what was then the town of Tiguabos.² Mateo Oliva was also born in Kingston. A free *pardo*, he was a landowner and slaveowner in the 1860s, but he left Guantánamo for Kingston temporarily in 1875 in order to avoid dangers associated with the Ten Years' War (1868-1878). Records indicate that he took his four children with him and left Lorenzo Oliva, a free mulatto, in charge of his estate.³ Alejandrina Gantier Delinre, also a native of Kingston, settled in Baracoa in 1838, where she married the North American Luis E. Truité y Dujart, an owner of farmland. In 1862 the couple moved to Guantánamo together with their six children, where they acquired a new estate and five enslaved Africans.⁴ Isabel Nelson, native of Martinique as well as wife of the mason Leopoldo Nelson, was a free *morena* who migrated to the town of Santa Catalina of Guantánamo in 1879, the same year that the registry was created.⁵

In 1875, Lawrence B. Morris arrived in Guantánamo from the British colony of New Providence, which is the main island of the contemporary Bahamas. A native of Nassau, he established a business at 44 Calle Valdés. Records indicate that he was the owner of seven enslaved Africans.⁶

The small number of Anglophone Caribbean inhabitants that migrated to the southeast of Oriente Province in the nineteenth century—mulattos, free *pardos*, and whites—generally worked in economic activities associated with agricultural production. However, some of them became successful

² Genoveva Presseau was a free woman of color who was eighty-one in 1879. She lived, together with her niece Genoveva Barbier at 40 Vargas St. in the town of Guantánamo.

³ Lorenzo Oliva and Adlea Oliva both maintained the property, where three enslaved Africans and six free mulattos worked. In 1879, Mateo Oliva was living temporarily in Kingston, together with his four children, who in Cuba were classified as free *pardos*: Lucía Oliva Carbonell (age 16), Jorge (age 14), Isabel (age 11), and María (age 8).

⁴ Alejandrina Gantier Delinre was born in Kingston in 1821. She was the mother of seven children who were fathered by Luis E. Truité y Dujart: Ernesto (1840), Emilia (1848), Julio Pablo (1851), Felipe (1856), Leocadia (1858), Lidia (1856), and María (1864). The first six were born in Baracoa and the last in Guantánamo. In 1879, the couple lived at 28 Real St.

⁵ Both of these individuals were free. They lived at 7 Real St. in Guantánamo.

⁶ Morris, who was born in Nassau in 1819, ran a business in Guantánamo.

in business ventures. The majority of them left behind a large number of offspring, descendants who generally made a modest but positive contribution to the economic development of the jurisdiction.

First Wave Migration

The municipality of Guantánamo experienced some immigration in the second half of the nineteenth century, but it was limited. In contrast, the numbers of migrants coming out of both Europe and the Caribbean during the early decades of the twentieth century grew to the point that they exceeded local customs officials' estimates. Guantánamo's socioeconomic panorama was grim at the end of the War of 1898. This armed conflict had led to situations of economic ruin and to a decrease in the size of the population. It was not only smaller than that of earlier periods, but also older. During the years of war, birth rates plummeted.

In 1860, the jurisdiction's population included 20,000 inhabitants; almost forty years later, in 1899, the population was 28,000, according to the census that the occupying American forces completed.⁷ As comparing these numbers shows, it took four decades for the population to increase by 8,000 people. The effects of war proved cruel, and they had a discernable impact on both society and the economy. One of its effects was that the natural increase in the size of population couldn't provide the number of laborers needed to move the economy forward (Jenks 139). More labor was needed to sustain future growth. For these reasons, authorities believed that it was necessary to import labor, to increase the work force's "foreign element." In addition, companies needed to be able to rely on both a pool of foreign reserves and on capitalists from within the country.

Interest in Cuban sugar on the part of North American industrialists and merchants was evident by 1899, as shown by this statement from J.R. Post of B.H. Howell, Son, and Company: "we believe that commercial interventions in sugar would be good business under the sponsorship of our government." Mr. Post hoped that Blacks from the U.S. South would migrate to Cuba to work on its plantations and at the same time "Americanize" the country. Had this project been completed as Post and others imagined it, it would have violated Cuba's sovereignty as well as reshaped its identity.

⁷ *Report on the Census of Cuba, 1899*, 28.

The presence of workers from Britain's Caribbean colonies began to have greater impact in Guantánamo as of 1902, when they contributed to the construction of a railway line from the port of Boquerón, en Guantánamo Bay, to the small town of San Luis. This was also the time in which American and British sugar and railroad companies used their dominant position in the Cuban state to gain further control by imposing themselves upon the country's agrarian bourgeoisie.

The contract laborers who cleared land and built the railway, the important communications project that would connect Guantánamo with the rest of Cuba, endured long working hours and horrible living conditions. A small group of laborers, one made up of machinists, boilermen, and technicians, were treated slightly better by their employers. The railroad construction project in the Central Valley of Guantánamo was the first company to hire workers from the British Caribbean (Jenks 139). Officials of the Guantánamo Sugar Company contracted Jamaican workers as early as 1914, according to company records from the same year. Workers were needed in the area of the northwestern coast to construct new sugar production plants as well as to expand old ones. They also developed new areas of production for the company (Jenks 143).

The history of exploitation that immigrant workers from other parts of the Caribbean faced in Cuba is relatively well known. But it's worth pointing out that their saga emerged as the result of a combination of various factors, among which were low wages, excessive work hours, poor living conditions, and lack of job security. In general, these conditions prevailed between 1902 and 1913, as well as during the longer period of economic crisis during the 1920s. These events hit immigrants especially hard, among them agricultural laborers, port and dockworkers, and those who worked in railroad construction.

Sugar's clear development drove the growth of the large companies that produced it, increasing their capacity as well as their purchases and sales on a large scale. The most important consequence of this development was the exploitation of vast amounts of the region's virgin land.

The scarcest resource was labor for the workforce. Spanish immigrants were considered a possible source of labor, but the majority of the potential sugar workers among them preferred other types of employment that were available to them. In response to the shortage of labor, the government issued a series of decrees authorizing companies to import contract workers,

all of which included the provision that they would leave Cuba once their contracts expired.

In the Sugar *Centrales* of Guaso Valley

In 1914, several North American firms invested substantial capital in the area's sugar industry. Guantánamo Sugar Co. invested in three mills: Isabel, Los Caños, and Soledad. Two other firms, the Santa Cecilia Sugar Co. and the Confluente Sugar Co., invested in the Santa Cecilia and Confluente mills, respectively. Those who operated these and other mills faced the serious problem of the scarcity of labor. They needed workers who could carry out agricultural as well as industrial labor. It was Nipe Bay Company, at the time a guise for United Fruit Company, that first introduced Antillian workers to address the labor shortage. The Cuban government authorized its immigration plan, which was one that was possible due to the aforementioned government decrees.

Jamaican migrant laborers were prominent among the crews of woodcutters that were used to clear virgin forests. They were based in work camps that were organized in various parts of the province, including one called the New Montego Bay that was established in the zone around Ermita. The massive destruction of the forests carried out by the crews extended over a period of several months. Once that stage of the work was complete, all of the trees that had been cleared were burned, creating a huge fire that extended over hundreds of hectares. The following spring, sugar cane was planted in the unplowed ground between the blackened mounds of ash. This took place during a period of economic boom, which explains why the wages that the immigrant workers received were higher than any other place in the tropics.

The development of the sugar industry was the largest capitalization project that had been developed in Guantánamo up until that time. It was supported by large-scale investment, the opening up of communication channels, and, significantly, increases in prices paid for exports.

World War I marked the beginning of a new stage in the period of global demand for sugar. In Havana in July 1914, raw sugar was sold at the price of \$1.93 per pound. In 1916 and 1917, Cuba's harvest of more than three million tons sold at \$4.62 per pond.

In 1917, the president of the Republic of Cuba, Mario García Menocal, approved an immigration law that had been voted on by the country's

Congress, marking the beginning of the period in which the number of foreigners entering the country increased substantially. Most of the Jamaican contract workers arrived through the port of Santiago de Cuba, but a smaller number of them arrived through the customs office at Guantánamo Bay.

This migration took place when Jamaica was still a Crown Colony, at a time in the history of British colonialism in which laws were gradually modified to improve relations between the Crown and the people of Jamaica. The British established councils in which Jamaicans were allowed to serve as local representatives of the colony. They were allowed to express their opinions, which could be either accepted or rejected by Her Majesty the Queen. The Crown categorized everyone born in Jamaica as an English subject, a status that would influence a considerable number of Jamaicans, including those who identified themselves as Black Englishmen once they were in Cuba's province of Oriente.

In the first few decades of the century, Jamaicans as well as migrants from Barbados and St. Kitts sometimes received support from the British Consulate, especially when they were arrested by the police or law enforcement officers who were assigned to rural areas. This made them feel somewhat more protected than Haitians and other groups of Caribbean migrants. Nevertheless, British diplomats showed very little concern about the numerous problems that these workers faced. The latter included the exhausting nature of their shifts, the amount that they were paid, the lack of time off for rest, the relative absence of physical protection, and the poor conditions of the housing that their employers provided. The diplomats also appear to have been relatively silent about the abuse that Jamaican and Haitian contract workers suffered at the hands of their bosses and businessmen. It should be noted that it was Cuban authorities who intervened on behalf of those who were beaten and subjected to other types of physical violence.

Jamaicans and Haitians made up substantial parts of the work forces of both sugar plantations and mills during the economic crisis that began in 1921 and ended in 1935. Laborers of indigenous ancestry and migrants from other places in the British Antilles also worked in these settings, though in smaller numbers. Many of the migrants did not speak Spanish, and their lives were restricted largely to the capitalist spheres that emerged around the plantations. Most were paid with vouchers that could only be used in the shops and stores that belonged to the owners of the plantations and mills. Those that did manage to save a little money generally sent it to support

family members who lived in Guantánamo, in other parts of Cuba, or back in their countries of origin. Only a few managed to take cash savings back with them after the expiration of their contracts.

The immigrants who lived in company housing in the camps and near the sugar mills differed from those who formed communities in Guantánamo City, Caimanera, and the settlement known as Jamaica. Those in the camps were generally more uneducated than those who lived in Cuba's cities and towns. Most of the former migrants lived not in their own homes but in company barracks, which the Jamaicans referred to as *baraccas*, a term based on the Spanish word *barracones*. They earned low wages and had to endure trying socioeconomic circumstances. The men among them were paid a peso a day for twelve hours of work. The women earned less, making only eighty cents a day. Their work included cooking, weeding, cleaning, and the feeding of animals. Like the men, they worked long hours, typically having to wake up at three or four in the morning to prepare breakfast and lunch.

Some of the North American companies preferred to hire migrant workers from British colonies over Cubans and Haitians because of their knowledge of the English language. Sometimes these workers acquired a higher status than others, which shows that their bosses placed a substantial amount of trust in them. Some English-speaking contract workers even served as foremen and watchmen. At times the owners pitted the different groups of workers against one another in order to divide them.

Those who found stable employment in the cities of Guantánamo City and Yateras, as well as Caimanera, were better compensated. These migrants held jobs in business and were employed by foreign as well as Cuban-owned firms. Some worked for the railroad or the U.S. naval base. Others secured jobs related to specific talents that they possessed. Immigrant workers from other parts of the Caribbean generally had a lower socioeconomic status than Cubans, but the education level of the Jamaicans who resided in Guantánamo City surpassed that of the *guantanameros*.

Demographic Growth

Caribbean and Spanish migration clearly impacted population growth in eastern Cuba during the first few decades of the twentieth century. According to the Cuban census of 1934, Guantánamo and Yateras had a combined population of 116,000 inhabitants. Their population increased by

88,000 (314%) in only thirty-five years, from 28,000 in 1899 to 116,000 in 1934. The increase was much less between 1869 and 1899, with an increase of 8,000 (45%). While the immigration of foreign workers played a central role in growth, it should be noted that natural reproduction among the local population also contributed to it.

Customs officials and individuals who worked in law enforcement in the rural areas were charged with identifying and deporting migrants who had entered Cuba illegally. One of the problems that they faced was that migrant workers did not always carry proper identification documents with them. Language played a role in the officials' strategies for determining their nationality. The officials would ask those English speakers whose identity they wanted to verify to pronounce the Spanish words *perejil* and *jamón con huevos*. If they pronounced these with English phonology, then administrators were able to confirm that they were subjects of the British Crown. If not, they were likely to be deported.

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, about two-thirds of the Jamaicans working in eastern Cuba intended to return to their homeland upon completion of their contracts. A shift in migrants' plans took place during the economic downturn under the government of Alfredo Zayas, who served as President of Cuba from 1921 to 1925. At that time many immigrants lost money in Cuba's banks. Because they didn't have the funds needed to pay their way back home, they decided to stay in Cuba indefinitely.

Statistics indicate that between 22,000 and 26,000 men and women migrated from Britain's Caribbean colonies to the Guantánamo Basin between 1902 and 1934. Between 40% and 50% of these individuals returned to their homelands upon completing their contracts.

[. . .] The world economic crisis that emerged in Cuba was one factor to influence the Jamaican government's decision to permit 40,000 to return to their country in 1933. Another factor contextualizing that return migration was the depreciation of sugar prices on the world market.

In the 1940s, parity was reached between the number of Jamaican, Arab, and Chinese immigrants, on the one hand, and Cuban nationals, on the other. Some members of these groups worked in the few social services that were available at the time. Haitians continued doing the most difficult work, which was also the lowest paying, and their living conditions were often deplorable. It is estimated that around 40,000 Jamaicans resided in Cuba in 1950.

Places of Origin

Guantánamo's civil registry contains records of marriage. These papers and documents in its citizenship section assist in determining information about migrants, including their countries of origin. Analysis of these documents indicates that most of the migrants came from Jamaica. It also shows that contract workers arrived from a total of seventeen different islands, all of which were British colonial possessions.

Country	Males	Females	Subtotals
Jamaica	241	107	348
St. Kitts & Nevis	38	11	49
Antigua	11	3	14
Barbuda	10	2	12
Barbados	8	3	11
Anguilla	7	2	9
Monsterrat	5	2	7
Grand Turk	3	1	4
Grand Cayman	1	1	2
Guyana	3		3
Trinidad	3		3
St. Vincent	1		1
Dominica	1		1
Bermuda	1		1
Anegada	1		1
St. Thomas	3		3
Total	337	132	469

Immigrants from British colonies in the Caribbean, 1902-1940

Archival documents also include information about race. They show that 68% of the migrants were black, 24% of mixed race, and 8% white. A total of 72% were male and 28% female, which underscores the demographic imbalance that existed between the sexes. In terms of age, the largest group consisted of migrants between the ages of twenty and forty, which make up 75% of the cases examined. Migrants between the ages of forty-one and fifty made up 10% of the population and those younger than nineteen made up 9%. Some older individuals also migrated for work, with persons older than fifty-one making up 6% of the migrants.

The Central Role of Loma del Chivo

From the first decades of the twentieth century, the neighborhood known as Loma del Chivo, situated in the east of Guantánamo City, west of the Guaso River, was the primary area where Jamaicans and other immigrants settled. This spatial proximity helped to preserve the cultural traditions they brought from their home islands. Later, however, some new immigrants settled in other parts of the city, in particular to the north, in the neighborhood known as España Chiquita, and to the south, in La Verbena.

These immigrant communities were able to recreate the social institutions that had developed in English colonial societies: churches, lodges, community and recreation centers, schools, and English-language academies. In this way, these immigrants lived within and perpetuated a society that was more or less closed to outsiders (Espronceda Amor, 8).

The founding of societies of mutual aid and protection, like the Good Will Society (which closed in 1958), the Young People's Fellowship Society, the Dragon Club (1930) and the Rinel Club, as well as associations including the Self-Help Society (1920), which became the Good Will Society in 1933 and later the Eureka, contributed to the passing on of social traditions drawn from Anglophone islands. The transmission of these community traditions was also furthered by lodges like the Santa Catalina (1906), the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (1907), Shepherd (1920), Forester, Good Samaritan, Fisherman, Mount Herb Temple, Sol Star, the United Order of Independent Mechanics, the Star of Galilea, the Eye of God, and a women's chapter/auxiliary, Chapter of Queens No.1 which was unique in that its founders came from Saint James, Jamaica (Espronceda Amor, 28).

In the Jamaican community in Guantánamo City, the international Garveyite movement, led by Marcus Garvey, who had visited Guantánamo in 1920, organized a division of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which was without a doubt the organization with the strongest foothold in the Jamaican expatriate community during this era. A "closed" institution that drew on the practices and ethos of the Masons, it did not permit entry to anyone who was not a black person from Jamaica. When UNIA was reorganized on February 28, 1928, it established its headquarters on Antonio Saco Street at the corner of Narciso López y Paseo, in the Loma del Chivo neighborhood. Its board of officers was as follows:

President (male): Richard A. Charles
First Vice President (male): Christian A. Frederick
Second Vice President (male): David Ramsay (Pastor)
Secretary General: George Tyril
Assistant Secretary: Ethlin Phillips
President (female): Mary Francis
First Vice President (female): Theodora Thomas
Second Vice President (female): Angelina Mac-Cleunon
Third Vice President (female): Claudina Mathias
Treasurer: Benchal S. Rusell
Treasurer: Fardinarid Samul
Chaplain: William Pitler
Spokesman: Jacob Crisghton
Spokesman: Hubery Millr
Spokesman: Henol Stem
Spokesman: Jones Seffers
Spokesman: Lashua Meach

The members of UNIA, and the Jamaican community in general, did not take part in political activities in Guantánamo, and they maintained their distance from the Cuban workers' movement. Its leaders warily observed the goals of the proletarian struggle on the island. Their stance was severely criticized by Cuban workers.

Meanwhile, Jamaican women gathered under the auspices of a society called La Cruz Negra, a humanitarian mutual aid organization led in 1930 by Mary Francis and Angelina Mac-Cleunon. Its goal was to gather material resources to help disadvantaged members of the local British-Caribbean community.

Two important factors affected immigrants in Cuba in the 1930s and 1940s. The first was repatriation, which was not entirely a new issue. The Decree of October 19, 1933, ordered that all unemployed foreigners who lacked an economic means of support be repatriated. This process of repatriation forced a large number of Haitian immigrants, and to a lesser extent Jamaican immigrants, to leave the country. The repatriation mandate lasted for a number of years, and painful, humiliating scenes played out across the southeastern side of Cuba. A second key development was that the 1940 constitution of the Cuban Republic provoked important changes in

the treatment of immigrants. As a result of these developments, “Cuban” was defined as referring specifically to those born in Cuba, even if their parents were foreigners. The implementation of this Supreme Law of the Republic unquestionably weakened the divides separating the smaller, semi-closed communities of Jamaicans from the larger Cuban community.

Jamaicans on the North American Naval Base

The United States naval base in Guantánamo Bay, established in the summer of 1898, constituted an important source of employment for Jamaican immigrants to Cuba. Beginning in 1902, hundreds of Jamaicans had worked on the base as manual laborers, maintaining installations, in technical positions, and in various administrative posts. From 1934 to the 1960s, they were the second most important group of workers on the base in both quantitative and qualitative terms, second only to the Cubans.

As international tensions heightened, presaging the outbreak of World War II, the marine command in Washington, DC, affirmed the importance of the U.S. naval station at Guantánamo Bay.⁸ Ever since, this site has been a main base of U.S. military operations in the Caribbean, partly as a result of the fact that in 1938, the U.S. government resumed the expansion and construction of large military works and of a modern, functional infrastructure that enabled it to become the second most active port in the world during the war years, second only to the Port of New York.

In any given year between 1938 and 1945, the base employed an average of more than 10,000 workers. An estimated 75% were Cuban, 20% were Jamaican, and 5% were of other nationalities. During those seven years, it is likely that 2,000 to 2,500 Jamaicans served as dockworkers, construction workers, mechanics, painters, pipefitters, carpenters, electricians, engineers, accountants, firefighters, heads of work brigades, and even heads of departments.

⁸The May 29, 1934, Treaty of Relations between the United States and Cuba replaced the Platt Amendment while conserving “the agreement in regard to the lease to the United States of America of lands in Cuba for coaling and naval stations.... [T]he stipulations of that agreement with regard to the naval station of Guantanamo [sic] shall continue in effect...” The language of the treaty continued, “So long as the United States of America shall not abandon the said naval station of Guantanamo or the two Governments shall not agree to a modification of its present limits, the station shall continue to have the area that it now has [. . .].”

The period comprising World War II and the Cold War, from approximately 1939 to 1954, saw the largest and most active Jamaican presence on the base and in the Guantánamo region in general. Most of these immigrants and their children worked with dignity and honor, satisfying their own financial and material needs while at the same time enriching the larger community with their knowledge, in particular of economic accounting and the English language.

A significant number of Jamaicans, having grown up in a society distinct historically and ideologically from that of Cuba, remained removed from Cuban politics. They did not join the workers' unions on the naval base due to their status as foreigners, as well as the constant threat of being expelled from the country by the authorities—a fact that provoked angry responses among the Cubans. This tension was exacerbated by the fact that groups of Jamaicans were sometimes hired by North American base officials to break strikes, as a way to diminish the power of the workers' movement.⁹

Starting in the 1940s, a segment of Cuban and immigrant workers on the base had formed an “elite” within the *guantanamero* workers' movement. These employees had a higher standard of living, and an elevated social status in general. Being an employee of the aircraft station conferred a special status. This select group was further divided into three smaller groups, according to the particular ideology they espoused:

- o Defenders of authentic Cuban identity with an anti-imperialist political consciousness, aligned with the workers' movement.
- o The “pure” or “apolitical” who did not intervene in Cuban politics and tended not to align themselves with the workers' movement. A significant number of British-Caribbean immigrants on the base belonged to this group.
- o The “manchados” or “stained ones,” a minority aligned with the authorities on the base and strongly linked to pro-American interests [the *mujalista* labor movement] and the prevailing Cuban social order of the time.¹⁰

⁹ Lara, Luis (oral history).

¹⁰ Lara, Luis, Rolando Quintero Mena, Federico Figueras Larrazabal, and Héctor Borges (“Tati”) (oral histories).

We know from the testimony of Luciano García (also called Chanito), the leader of the railway workers, that in 1947 the leftist leader Gustavo Fraga Jacobino became aware that the elite were organizing against the workers. In union meetings that took place that year, he warned of the potential danger that it represented for the workers' movement.¹¹

Among the British-Caribbean immigrants and their descendants who embraced the Cuban workers' movement were members of the directorship of the employees' union on the base, including Charles Grant Sherwood and Carlos Jones.¹² In the struggle against the Bautista dictatorship, we should note as well the efforts of Hilario F. Brown, also known as Panchito, a Martinican of Jamaican heritage who was a leader among the workers and a communist, and who served as Secretary General of the Popular Socialist Party in the Término Municipal of Guantánamo. Also notable were the efforts of Newton Stoute Green, who fought in the 26th of July Movement and was the founder of the Gustavo Adolfo Moll Supply Committee on the North American base, as well as the combatant Jorge Pell.¹³

Upon the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, tensions between the U.S. and Cuban governments heightened. North American naval authorities expelled hundreds of Cuban workers from the base, some of them descendants of migrants from the British Caribbean. Faced with this situation, many of the Jamaicans working on the base returned to Jamaica. A significant number, however—those married to Cubans and parents of Cuban children—opted to remain in Cuba, the Pearl of the Antilles.

¹¹ Luciano Garcia, Chantito (oral history 1984).

¹² These individuals were active according to union documentation from May of 1955.

¹³ Borges, Héctor ("Tati") and Rolando Quintero Mena (oral histories 1999).

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REVIEWS

Guantánamo Public Memory Project, the Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University, gitmomemory.org.

The Guantánamo Public Memory Project (hereafter, GPMP) is an internet archive aimed at establishing a culture of remembrance for Guantánamo Bay under U.S. occupation, one that documents the memories of individuals whose biographies are tied to macro-historic developments involving the naval base's past. Through the preservation and contextualization of personal stories and eyewitness accounts, and with a proactive approach that involves reaching out to universities and museums to capitalize on the insights gained through the dissemination of the project's findings, GPMP aims to create an immersive people's history of Guantánamo.

The project's homepage consists of an inflatable window presenting its contents, centered within a satellite image of Guantánamo Bay and its surroundings. Site visitors can select among several tabs: "Stories," "Place," "Timeline," "Participate," "Resources," "About," and "Blog."

The "Stories" section presents a collage of portraits that link to biographical information about individuals involved in specific episodes of Guantánamo's history, under the heading "What can we learn from GTMO's past? What should we remember about what's happening now? Hear from those who were there." The anecdotes that are featured represent multiple facets of the GPMP endeavor, including, for example, biopics like the one in which Daniela Stewart tells the story of her family becoming U.S. citizens after moving from Cuba's Guantánamo City to the base, and then to the mainland in the 1970s. At the end of the video, the site offers "another perspective," linking to the story of Lieutenant General Ayres, who was dispatched to the base in 1994. Ayres oversaw security personnel tasked with guarding the refugee camps, which at the time held tens of thousands of Cuban and Haitian migrants. Another example suggestive of the scope of diverging impres-

sions documented in the archive is the ACLU-produced clip of the tortured detainee Omar Deghayes (who was held from 2002 until 2007); his account is contextualized by Professor David Frakt, who explains that the majority of prisoners incarcerated in the wake of 9/11 were indeed innocent men.

The “Place” section reveals a movable satellite image that zooms in on the bay, with add-in symbols pointing to the exact locations of various places of interest, like the now-retired Camp X-Ray, a migrant facility re-purposed to serve as an open-air cage for the hundreds of men that the U.S. identified as suspected terrorists. Users can click “Related Theme,” where most of the information is interconnected with the broader scope of GTMO’s history. The current migrant detention center, for instance, is described as having been designed to harbor far fewer refugees than arrived in the 90s, which does not bode well for the migrant children that the Trump administration has considered sending there, as it would mean that they probably would have to cope with both their current challenges as well the facility’s numerous inadequacies.

The “Timeline” tab provides a rundown of the most important events and developments concerning the base, offering an informative narrative that reflects the views and values of the site’s designers. It also features a graphic timeline ranging from 1898 to the present, with multicolored areas indicating the various periods that comprise the historical record. The framing of Guantánamo’s annexation during the 1898 Spanish-American War is one example of the authors’ focus on the historical discourse of the U.S., as it references U.S. imperialism with the heading “What Are the Consequences of Global Expansion?” The accompanying text reviews the record of U.S. presidents who have lobbied for the conquest of Cuba in the contexts of anti-abolitionism, imperialism, and other motives. While these actions are not explicitly critiqued, their negative effects are presented as reverberating up to the present day.

The site’s “Participate” segment allows for active engagement in the project, like voting on urgent issues (e.g., “Should GTMO be returned to Cuba?”), participation in public events, access to teaching materials, and opportunities to contribute materials to GPMP’s archive. Its “Resources” button leads to further subdivisions: a “limited bibliography” features monographs, academic articles, and historical documents covering a diverse spectrum of GTMO-related issues. Unfortunately, the list does not feature any works that could be considered recent, with the latest title dating to 2011. In contrast, the “Re-

lated Archives” subsection offers more promising resource-corpora, providing links to sites hosted by Stanford and Miami University that cover pivotal epochs of the base’s history.

The “About” section leads to information about various topics, among them an exhibit schedule, which also needs to be updated given that the last event is from 2015. On the other hand, the section introduces a traveling exhibit, a project in which students from all across the U.S. have considered how GTMO’s relates to current issues. They examined archival documents; conducting interviews with workers, detainees, and guards; and then presented their findings to the public. Links to project feedback and guidelines for becoming involved are available on the site.

Finally, the “Blog” presents an archive of topical posts dealing with current affairs, again with the online traffic stopping with news from 2015. Unfortunately, no recent entry has received any comments.

As its name suggests, the Guantánamo Public Memory Project aims to document and circulate diverse perspectives related to U.S. actions at GTMO. Therefore, instead of deducing individual fates as a relevant element of the historical, legal, and political implications of operating the base, the project takes an inductive approach, one in which interviews with people associated with Guantánamo can provide a foundation for users’ understandings of the historical record, current politicking, and GTMO’s cultural impact. Noteworthy is that its videos include valuable qualitative information, and that most are audiovisual productions which feature footage from the sites or the events discussed. For these reasons, GPMP is a very effective (re)source.

The site underscores ways in which the humanities, fields of knowledge that increasingly struggle against accusations of redundancy and irrelevance, offer practical insights and theoretical frameworks that can shape real-world progress. Practitioners of the humanities are able to impact public consciousness in a palpable way by addressing issues that are of utmost importance to the detainees at GTMO and members of the American public. Both of these groups are denied several intrinsic rights in the ongoing affair: while the right to just treatment is withheld from the captives, U.S. citizens, subjects of a democracy, are denied objective information that allows them to contribute to formulating opinions about affairs at Guantánamo Bay.

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Honigsberg, Peter Jan. *Witness to Guantánamo, witnessstoguantanamo.com.*

The website Witness to Guantánamo (WtG) is one of the most powerful of the internet projects related to the documentation of events that have taken place at the detention facilities and prison camps that form part of the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. It uses film to document and share insights and diverse points of view related to this place: those of former detainees, their family members, attorneys, government and military officials, interrogators, prison guards, medical personnel, attorneys, interpreters, human rights advocates, and journalists. The WtG project provides an impressive total of 158 interviews with witnesses from twenty different countries, making it a comprehensive online resource.

The project's main focus combines documentation with the cultivation of dialogue, as noted in the description of its mission, which is "to give voice to former detainees and others who have witnessed the impact of the detention center." As explained, it aims to "offer these compelling stories to promote public dialogue, foster a shared humanity, and inspire future generations to never again repeat the mistakes of Guantánamo."

The project was started by Professor Peter Jan Honigsberg of the University of San Francisco's School of Law in the fall 2008 with the purpose of filming, recording, and preserving the stories of Guantánamo voices. Honigsberg is the founder of the project and the person who has conducted the interviews. He visited the Guantánamo prison camp in 2007 and published some of the photographs that he took there on WtG. In addition, he has described his experience in the article "Inside Guantánamo" (2009), which is featured in the site's news section.

Honigsberg was inspired by the work of a grassroots truth commission and the Shoah Foundation's collection of Holocaust survivor testimonies. Honigsberg maintains a personal connection to the Shoah Foundation, as his father's story was one of 52,000 testimonies filmed for the project. His professional achievements also prepared him for this work. In addition to his training in law, he is the author of *Crossing Border Street: A Civil Rights Memoir* (2002) and *Our Nation Unhinged: The Human Consequences of the War on Terror* (2009).

The webpage includes various sections, among which are videos, news, the story of GTMO, and a project description. The homepage features links to videos and pictures of interviewees, with a personal quote that catches the attention of the user. For example, one from the ex-detainee Moazzam Begg reads: “During one interrogation, with the sounds of women screaming next door, it was suggested that my wife was being tortured.” These are the words that Begg uses to identify his “worst fear.”

The videos are short, with each lasting between 50 seconds and five minutes. Clicking on a video reveals a short biography for the interviewee, the date and place it was made, the interviewee’s home country, and the main topics addressed. When necessary, translations of languages other than English are provided. In these cases, the person speaks first in his or her language and then interpretation follows. Users can download transcripts of the videos, and they also have the chance to comment on the videos. All of these details make them excellent resources for future research.

The videos are organized around several central themes: America’s Reputation, Closing Guantánamo, A Day in the Life, Deaths, Faith & Religion, Indefinite Detention, Injustice, Interrogation, Life After, Man vs. Myth, Medical Care, Physical and Psychological Torture, Pro-Guantánamo, Trials, Whistleblowers, Women at Guantánamo, and Young & Incarcerated.

The interviews feature the real voices of real people who are connected in different ways to the naval base at Guantánamo Bay. They are powerful because they’re personal, detailed, and contextualized. They are not typical journalism. In addition, the videos have not been filtered, produced, or edited by the U.S. government. This is significant given the government’s record of redacting writings from Guantánamo (e.g., Mohamedou Ould Slahi’s memoir *Guantánamo Diary* and a large number of legal documents) and, more broadly, its decision to repeatedly limit the information about Guantánamo that is available to the general public.

The Life After videos were among the most compelling and emotional for me. Ex-detainee Bisher Al Rawi speaks about his efforts to get his “old me” back and explains that even after being back home for four years he still needs a bit more time to be normal again. I always asked myself about life after GTMO, hoping that the ex-detainees have managed to regain a sense of normality. My hope is alive not because he says he has already accomplished this, but because I heard his “voice” and know that it also gives hope to all GTMO detainees.

Information included in the news article is also informative. The article “9/11: A Mystery to the Young” (2013) stunned me. It reveals a shocking fact: that many American youth aren’t very familiar with the 9/11 attacks. One girl named Lisa, for example, did not know the basic facts about this set of events; she couldn’t explain what had happened or the consequences of the attacks. It is shocking that this tragic incident was not written about in the history books used in her formal education. Young people have to be aware of the basic facts to understand better the consequences of the attacks, among which are the Guantánamo Bay prison camps.

The article is accompanied by three videos that document the views of different individuals: a government official who names the youth “the Guantánamo Generation”; a military official who speaks about beliefs that the military had immediately after 9/11; and a prison guard who speaks about his training to be a guard, training that encouraged him to see detainees to be at fault for what happened at “ground zero.” Illustrative of the links that exist across the site’s different resources, these videos assist users in understanding the War on Terror and its place in the world today.

WtG’s major aim is to make the faces and voices of Guantánamo seen and heard all over the planet. Its creators and contributors have made substantial progress towards this goal, not only by creating WtG’s infrastructure and collecting such a substantial set of significant stories, but also by sharing their work through YouTube and Twitter.

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Kahlili, Mustafa and Guy Grandjean (producers). “Guantánamo Bay: The Hunger Strikes” (6-minute video), Guardian Animations, published October 14, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VN4hewhWvY>

I have been detained at Guantánamo for 11 years and 6 months. I have never been charged with any crime. I have never received a trial. I have a wife and kids and I have been cleared for release for more than five years. (0:19-0:33)

In October 2013, the British newspaper *The Guardian* published the animated video “Guantánamo Bay: The Hunger Strikes | Guardian Animations” on YouTube. It reveals the brutality of daily life for detainees at the Guantánamo Bay detention camp. From not being allowed to practice their religion, suffering from sleep deprivation intentionally caused by guards, and being force fed via nasal catheter, detainees have not only had their freedom stolen, but they’ve also been forced to endure serious human rights violations. In order to preserve the last bit of freedom, many detainees have gone on hunger strikes. As former detainee Mohamedou Ould Slahi describes in his book *Guantánamo Diary* (2015), a hunger strike not only serves as a form of protesting unacceptable conditions, but also as a means of coping with the pain and agony that guards and interrogators cause, since the lack of food often leads striking detainees to pass out. Unconsciousness provides an escape from physical and psychological harm, yet it is temporary and relegated by the members of the military that control the men. As noted by one of the voices quoted in the video: “But they do not want us to die. And they do not want us to live like a human being” (4:33-4:39).

The video features five detainees’ testimonies: Younous Chekkouri, Shaker Aamer, Ahmed Belbacha, Samir Mukbel, and Nabil Hadjarab. These testimonies paint a picture the U.S. government did not want anybody to see. Each of these individuals was cleared for release approximately five years after his incarceration began in 2002. However, when the video was published eleven years later, only Nabil Hadjarab had in fact been released. Born in the wrong place at the wrong time, all of these men were detained without any charges pressed against them; it appears that the only crime they committed was to be born with appearances and profiles that the United States classified as those of terrorists.

The video’s extremely graphic visuals show how forcefully the feeding tube is inserted through the nose into the stomach of the detainee. As explained, this is not only unhealthy and painful, it is also very dangerous, since the tube can easily slip into the trachea and fill the lungs instead of the stomach with liquid. Furthermore, the staff members that perform this controversial and violent act have not always been properly trained to do so, and sometimes end up hurting the detainees even more. One of the men subjected to the procedure recalled, “I will never forget the first time they

passed the feeding tube up my nose. I can't describe how painful it is to be force fed this way" (0:40-0:49).

The video's juxtaposition of visuals and voices proves compelling. Animations are often, at least in my personal experience, easier to follow than "real-life" documentaries because they create more distance between the viewer and the events that they represent. However, I believe that here the cross-section of the human body is illustrated in a compelling way, establishing a connection and minimizing the distance that is often associated with this medium.

The military prison at Guantánamo Bay has, in a sense, done a 180. After Barack Obama was inaugurated President of the United States in 2009, one of his first promises was to close the detention facilities at Guantánamo Bay and to transfer all of the men incarcerated there within one year. However, this goal was not achieved, even after his two terms in office. Moreover, eight years later, President Donald Trump annulled Obama's order, claiming that all of the detainees at Guantánamo "are extremely dangerous people and should not be allowed back onto the battlefield" (@realDonaldTrump, Jan. 3, 2017) and announcing that there would be no more releases from Gitmo. At the time of this writing, forty men remain incarcerated in this violent prison that military and government officials have dubbed a "detention facility." While some are still force fed, all have been denied basic human and legal rights.

The fact that this video was published six years ago and that many of the most problematic conditions at the prison have still hardly changed raises questions about how greater awareness about the situation could lead to change. The video reminds us that testimonies are powerful and informative. It also shows that people using skills and resources from the humanities (e.g., art, testimony, narrative, ethical arguments) are working to have an impact by making more information available to the public.

However, the challenges faced by practitioners of the humanities who strive to cultivate greater awareness are serious, and information about forced feeding and other controversial issues is tightly controlled by the U.S. In an October 2017 article in *The New Republic*, Lakhdar Boumediene writes about a different kind of torture related to the topic of this video. Boumediene tells readers that hunger strikers in the prison are said to no longer be force-fed but let to starve. This means that the U.S. government may have not only opted to torture prisoners through force-feeding (and other tactics)

but also developed policies that condone starvation. The best response to the situation would be to restore protections for the detainees' basic legal and human rights and abandon all forms of torture.

I can tell from my own experience that Austrian students are hardly educated concerning governmental issues in the United States. Before enrolling in a cultural studies seminar with Guantánamo Bay as its main topic, I barely knew anything about the detention facility. The video on force-feeding provides interesting yet shocking insights into the experience of detainees. It is a resource that students and others can watch to learn about incarceration practices in the twenty-first century and use to form their own opinions about how to formulate effective responses to injustice. The video might also be interesting for travelers going to Cuba, especially those who might not know anything about the detention center and the military base within which it exists. It can serve as a point of entry for better understanding how the island is caught up in a long history of struggle for political power.

The video is likely to remind viewers that both Barack Obama and Donald Trump have failed to act against injustice at Guantánamo Bay by not taking a firm and consistent stance against inhumane incarceration and illegal torture. The former detainees who bravely stood up to offer the testimonies used to create this video have been treated inhumanely, yet their words show that they are not hateful people. In contrast with important world leaders, they have tried their best to raise awareness about the horrible conditions prevailing in the detention facilities within the U.S. prison. Again and again, prisoners have said that they see a path forward, pointing out that they want to leave Guantánamo behind them and be reunited with their families. Testimony and the rejection of hate are both important for the future. Consider this statement from one of the men in the video: "Let us leave Guantánamo with clear hearts and without hatred. Hatred is evil, and it harms the person who is hating, as well as the person who is hated" (3:39-4:08).

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Worthington, Andrew and Tom Wilner. *Close Guantánamo, close-guantanamo.org.*

Since January 11, 2002, the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay and the dubious legal situation surrounding it have been the focus of considerable public debate. Established seventeen years ago by President George W. Bush as a holding facility for suspected 9/11 terrorists, the set of prison camps known to many as Guantánamo is the most recent incarnation of detention facilities at this location, and the space has a complex history. For example, in the early 1990s, a migrant detention facility was operated by the United States in the same location, in response to Haitian refugees fleeing their country in the wake of a coup d'état. Instead of allowing them to seek asylum on the mainland, the administration of U.S. president George H. W. Bush decided to detain those who had fled and declared that they were entitled neither to due process under the U.S. Constitution nor to the stipulations of the Geneva Conventions. Regrettably, this decision seems to have worked with other factors to establish a precedent for the treatment of those detained in Guantánamo in the decades that followed.

The Close Guantánamo website and campaign pillory U.S. efforts to operate outside national or international law and strive to elucidate the human rights abuses suffered by the detainees, most of whom have been held at the facility without charge or trial. Its creators maintain that despite the fact that the right of habeas corpus was fought for and won in two court cases in 2004 and 2008, respectively, the rights guaranteed to GTMO prisoners under this recourse have been effectively blocked in the lower courts. This means that despite considerable legal efforts, the detainees continue to be deprived of the rights that they should have as prisoners of war who are protected under the Geneva Conventions and as criminal suspects who have a right to trial. The Close Guantánamo campaign states that every day the facility is open “is a black mark against America’s notion of itself as a nation founded on the rule of law” and calls for its immediate closure.

The campaign’s website, closeguantanamo.org, is managed by Tom Wilner and Andy Worthington. Wilner is a renowned U.S. attorney who has represented Guantánamo prisoners in court, namely in *Rasul v. Bush* in 2004, the case that first established the right of habeas corpus in Guantánamo, and *Boumediene v. Bush* in 2008. Worthington is a freelance investigative

journalist, author of the book *The Guantánamo Files* (2007), and co-director of the documentary *Outside the Law: Stories from Guantánamo* (2009). In addition to completing work for the Close Guantánamo campaign, Wilner and Worthington have repeatedly issued public statements about the ill-treatment of detainees at the facility. They count an abundance of renowned human rights groups, lawyers, and activists among their supporters.

The website offers extensive information on the current and former prisoners and the legal circumstances exacerbating their situation in the subsection “Articles,” which consists of 254 texts by various authors. The subsection “Prisoners” dedicates a paragraph to each of the forty men currently detained in Guantánamo. These paragraphs include several links to texts that offer details about the decisions of the periodic review boards the prisoners have faced over the course of their incarceration. They underscore the fact that five men—Ridah Bin Saleh Al-Yazidi, Muleen Adeen Al-Sattar, Tawfiq Nasir Awad Al-Bihani, Abdul Latif Nasir, and Sufyian Barhoumi—are still imprisoned at the facility even though they were cleared for release under President Obama.

The website also manages the GTMO Clock, a device that is counting the number of days that the military prison at Guantánamo has been open. Worthington and Wilner ask that members of the general public take a photo with a downloadable poster that both announces the current day count and urges President Trump to close the facility. Each photo that is uploaded is archived on the website, contributing to the vast collection of voices and faces from around the world calling for the facility’s closure.

The website’s primary focus is the set of opaque legal arguments that have been used to justify the exemption of Guantánamo detainees from protections of the U.S. Constitution and the Geneva Conventions. Worthington and Wilner maintain that the practices employed at Guantánamo constitute human rights violations and explain that it is for this reason that they are raising awareness of the ways in which the U.S. government’s use of this space violates important laws. The awareness that they seek to cultivate is vital for conversations about Guantánamo Bay’s future, as critics contend that both the treatment of the prisoners as well as the U.S. military’s occupation of Cuban territory are unlawful. This suggests that those who advocate “closing Guantánamo” need to take into account the multiple violations of prisoners’ rights as well as debates concerning who controls the waters and land occupied by the military base. Focusing exclusively on the need to free

prisoners who were captured (and sometimes purchased) in the War on Terror diverts attention away from the base itself and could result in giving carte blanche for it to be repurposed as soon as the dust has settled. It is our collective responsibility to bear in mind that, if forgotten, the space left behind poses a threat.

The U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay has historically been a place of insufficient oversight and questionable legal conditions. First occupied by the U.S. military more than 100 years ago, it has become a space that many consider extralegal, one further obscured by reports that some operations there have taken place within a black site.”The administrators of closeguantanamo.org do outstanding work in holding the U.S. government accountable for its refusal to adhere to the rules that it demands the rest of the world respect. In rallying opponents of GTMO and incessantly reminding the world of the human rights abuses perpetrated there, this website provides an invaluable service to those formerly or currently detained in the base. It also reminds us that we cannot focus on the future of Guantánamo without recalling its past, which teaches us that simply removing one group of people from this space cannot protect others from subsequently falling victim to it. Even if the current prisoners are eventually set free, the space’s problematic relationship with the law must remain under public scrutiny so that the cycle of abuse can finally end.

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Tubiana, Jérôme and Alexandre Franc. *Guantanamo Kid—The True Story of Mohammed El-Gharani*. London: Self-Made-Hero, March 2019, 168 pages.

The graphic novel *Guantánamo Kid—The True Story of Mohammed El-Gharani*, which is written by Jérôme Tubiana and illustrated by Alexandre Franc, tells the story of a juvenile who was held at the Guantánamo Bay military prison for more than seven years. It covers Mohammed El-Gharani’s life before detention, his path to imprisonment, his survival be-

hind bars, and his release. Created in close collaboration with El-Gharani, the novel narrates the horrific acts that changed his life as a young prisoner who should have been presumed innocent but was held for years without having any charges ever pressed against him.

Endorsed by the organization Amnesty International, this publication shows that El-Gharani's basic rights were repeatedly violated while he was in U.S. custody. In addition, it suggests that the U.S. military and the larger government apparatus used innocent people for political gain and for the justification for war, at the same time systematically discriminating against people of the Muslim faith.

As explained in this graphic novel, Mohammed El-Gharani was fourteen when he decided to travel to Pakistan from Saudi Arabia to study English and computer science. While in Saudi Arabia, he was captured by local police and sold to the Americans for \$5,000. Mohammed professed his innocence, but the Americans were looking for terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks. They believed he was lying and sent him and others to Cuba where their detention centre for "enemy combatants" had been built. Mohammed was around fifteen years old when he arrived. Having already been tortured by the Pakistanis, he naively believed that U.S. military would treat him better; however, he was tortured in many horrific ways.

Yet, he was able to both survive and remain somewhat optimistic by finding ways to cope with the many abuses he was forced to endure. He did so, for example, by creating songs and playing pranks on his guards. His "biggest hit" was "Number Two," a song with lyrics that voiced resistance and insisted that he be treated humanely: "I will never regret what I do! You will never forget it, No. 2! If you treat us as human, human beings! If you treat us as animals, so will we, we will treat you as animals! No. 2!" (54). At times he sang this song with other detainees, and in some instance they would protest their abuse by throwing their excrement at the guards.

After a few years in Gitmo, he obtained a lawyer through his friend Shaker Aamer, an innocent man who was imprisoned at Guantánamo for more than thirteen years. That contact eventually led to his release. However, El-Gharani's traumatic journey did not end with his longer overdue release, as he was not allowed back to Saudi Arabia, the country where he grew up and has family. Instead, he was sent to Chad in north-central Africa, even though he had never been there and was not fluent in any of its local languages.

The novel's greatest strength is its format. The pictures help the reader

visualize the story and all of its characters. The depiction of military and FBI personnel highlights their treatment of prisoners but also humanizes them as individuals with their own personal histories and dilemmas. For example, the depiction of the relationship between El-Gharani and a guard of Mexican ancestry conveys information about the personal struggle that the guard faces when carrying out his orders. The guard even has a special nickname that he uses with El-Gharani, Chris. In one instance he says, “Chris, you know, I like you best of all, ‘cause you’re not scared and you stand up for your rights. Look, I don’t agree with all this shit, and I know you’re innocent . . . but what can I do?” (76). In this and other scenes, the black-and-white illustrations created by Franc detail the main character’s journey in a way that allows the reader to better understand life inside the detention centre.

Another strength of the book is that it depicts violent acts in an informative and tangible manner without sensationalizing abuse. For example, the text describes specific acts which show how prisoners were mistreated because of their faith, but also provides the reader with a sense of larger problems such as racism, islamophobia, and fascism. The text’s creators should also be commended for opening the topic of indefinite detention to readers of all ages. They do so in a way that is compelling and understandable, but tragically accurate.

As a future teacher, it’s clear to me that the book offers a great deal of material from which pupils can learn. In addition to learning about El-Gharani’s capture, imprisonment, and the challenges that he has faced recently, readers can critically approach the decisions made by representatives of the various agencies and governments that are responsible for violating basic human rights. Also noteworthy is that the format is intriguing for different types of learners, as it offers graphics that will directly engage the reader. Another positive aspect of the book is its responsible representation of Islam and the importance of the Koran for Muslims, topics that many readers only rarely have the opportunity to learn about.

The only possibly problematic aspect of using the book in a classroom might be the very explicit language that appears throughout its pages; however, high school students will likely already be familiar with such terms. An educator who is concerned about the issue could discuss the issue of profanity beforehand, explaining that it is an accurate representation of the circumstances in the prison.

The book is a reminder that it is important for young people to have the

opportunity to learn about the 2001 terrorist attacks and responses to them, including how the prison in Guantánamo Bay impacted the lives of individuals detained there. The book has the capacity to generate a significant degree of empathy among young readers given that El-Gharani was still a boy when he was captured and then spent his teenage years in prison under gruesome and horrifying circumstances. In addition, given that the prison is still operative, it may be that the younger generation will be tasked with finally closing it. Hence, it is not surprising that one of El-Gharani's wishes is for materials that chronicle his experiences to be accessible to youth.

The publication of this example of graphic nonfiction is timely. It was released when news headlines proclaimed that Donald J. Trump's administration was considering housing migrant children from Central America in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Furthermore, it follows both his administration's decision to revoke Obama's executive order to close the detention center and Trump's announcement that it would be filled up with "bad dudes." El-Gharani's story is thus in some ways even more relevant than it would have been had it appeared a decade earlier. The book not only depicts suffering and human right violations but also provides important context for understanding them, reminding the reader of a recent chapter in American history that many have tried to suppress and keep from public view. This graphic novel comes across as light and humorous in key instances while still conveying the message that Mohammed's story is anything but that.

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IN MEMORIAM: SALAAM

Don E. Walicek

Sargasso Editor

Contemplating the relationship between Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and the future brings with it the opportunity to ponder various questions about human mortality. Who remembers the dead and why? What, if anything, should be done to honor those who have been largely forgotten? Can memory help to prevent the unnecessary loss of life in years to come?

This special section allows readers to remember the nine Muslim men whose lives ended between 2006 and 2012, during their incarceration in the detention facilities that form part of the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay.

The circumstances surrounding their deaths were various. While some were reported to have died of natural causes, detailed research by investigative journalists suggests that other men in this group were the victims of homicide. In yet other instances, the violent nature of incarceration in the base's prison led to tragic circumstances in which some took their own lives. One of them was Adnan Farhan Abdul Latif, whose "Hunger Strike Poem" embraces *salaam*, the Arabic word for peace, as a motto for survival in the base's prison.

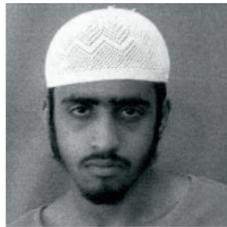
Inspired by print announcements in which many Puerto Ricans have remembered and honored family members, friends, and others, each of the memorials that follows includes the name of the deceased as well as the place and date of his birth. Photos have been included in all of the cases in which they could be identified. When images were not available, the star and crescent symbol, a sign of progress and knowledge in many Muslim cultures, was included.



Ali Abdullah Ahmed
Born in Ibb, Yemen on August 1, 1979
Died in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba on June 10, 2006



Mana Shaman Allabardi al Tabi
Born in Al Qarara, Saudi Arabia on January 1, 1976
Died in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba on June 10, 2006



Yasser Talal al Zahrani
Born in Saudi Arabia on September 22, 1984
Died in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba on June 10, 2006



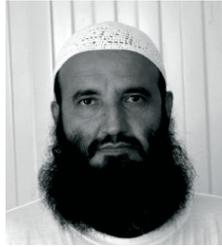
Abdul Rahman Maadha Al-Amry
Born in in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia on April 17, 1973
Died in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba on May 30, 2007



Abdul Razzaq Hekmati
Born in Kandahar, Afghanistan on January 1, 1947
Died in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba on December 30, 2007



Mohammad Ahmed Abdullah Saleh Al Hanashi
Born in Abyan, Yemen in February of 1978
Died in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba on June 1, 2009



Awal Gul

Born in Laghman Province, Afghanistan on July 1, 1962

Died in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba on February 2, 2011



Hajji Nassim

Born 1974 in Afghanistan

Died in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba on May 18, 2011



Adnan Farhan Abdul Latif

Born in Al Udayn District, Yemen in 1981

Died in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba on September 8, 2012

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Mansoor Adayfi spent nearly fifteen years without charge at the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo Bay, including eight years in solitary confinement. Originally from Yemen, he was resettled in Serbia upon his release in 2016. In Serbia, he has focused on continuing his education and writing about his experiences. Adayfi's publications and commentaries have been featured in the *New York Times* and on BBC Radio and CBC Radio. He has completed one book manuscript on art at Guantánamo, and he is currently revising his second manuscript, *Moments of Guantánamo*.

Diana Murtaugh Coleman is a lecturer in Religion within the Department of Comparative Cultural Studies at Northern Arizona University and a faculty associate of the Center for the Religion and Conflict at Arizona State University. She brings a multi-disciplinary expertise in religion and conflict to her work on militarism. Her current manuscript on Guantánamo Bay is under revision, and she has a forthcoming article in *Cultural Dynamics* (in press) on militarized responses to climate change and migration.

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Jorge Rodríguez Beruff is a historian and expert on Cuban affairs as well as a former dean of the College of General Studies at the University of Puerto Rico's Río Piedras Campus. His publications include the books *Cuba en crisis, perspectivas económicas y políticas* (University of Puerto Rico, 1995), *Strategy as Politics: Puerto Rico on the Eve of the Second World War* (University of Puerto Rico, 2007), and the co-edited volume *Conflict, Peace, and Development in the Caribbean* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1991).

Amílcar Sanatan lectures in the Department of Geography at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. Sanatan is also a poet whose work has appeared in the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* and *Interviewing the Caribbean*. He serves as the coordinator of the UWI Socialist Student Conference and hosts the open-mic U.WE SPEAK.

José Sánchez Guerra is the official historian of Guantánamo City. He is co-author of numerous articles and books, among which are *Coronel Policarpo Pineda Rustán* (Comité Provincial del PCC de Guantánamo, 1990), *Visión múltiple de Antonio Maceo* (Editorial Oriente, 1998), *El azúcar en el valle de los ingenios guantanameros 1556-1898* (2003), and *La emigración anglo-caribeña en Guantánamo* (2004). He is also the recipient of numerous scholarly prizes; they include the Ángel Escobar

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Prize (2003), the Centro Provincial de Cultura Comunitaria Award (2006), and the Regino E. Boti Prize (2007).

Astrid Schmalzhofer is a BA student of English and American Studies with a minor in linguistics at Karl-Franzens University in Graz, Austria. She works in adult education at two non-profit associations in Graz, where she is employed as a German as a Second Language trainer

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Irene Vázquez is a junior at Yale College. She is an Afro-Mexican poet and part of the 2021 cohort of Bouchet Fellows at Yale, where she studies French Caribbean poetics. Her works have appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* and *F(r)iction*, among other publications. Her work can be found at www.irenevazquez.com.

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Guantánamo Bay, watercolor by R.E. Boti, 1933

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SPECIAL SECTION

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TRANSLATION

Don E. Walicek & Jessica Adams